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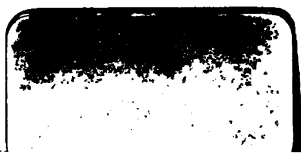
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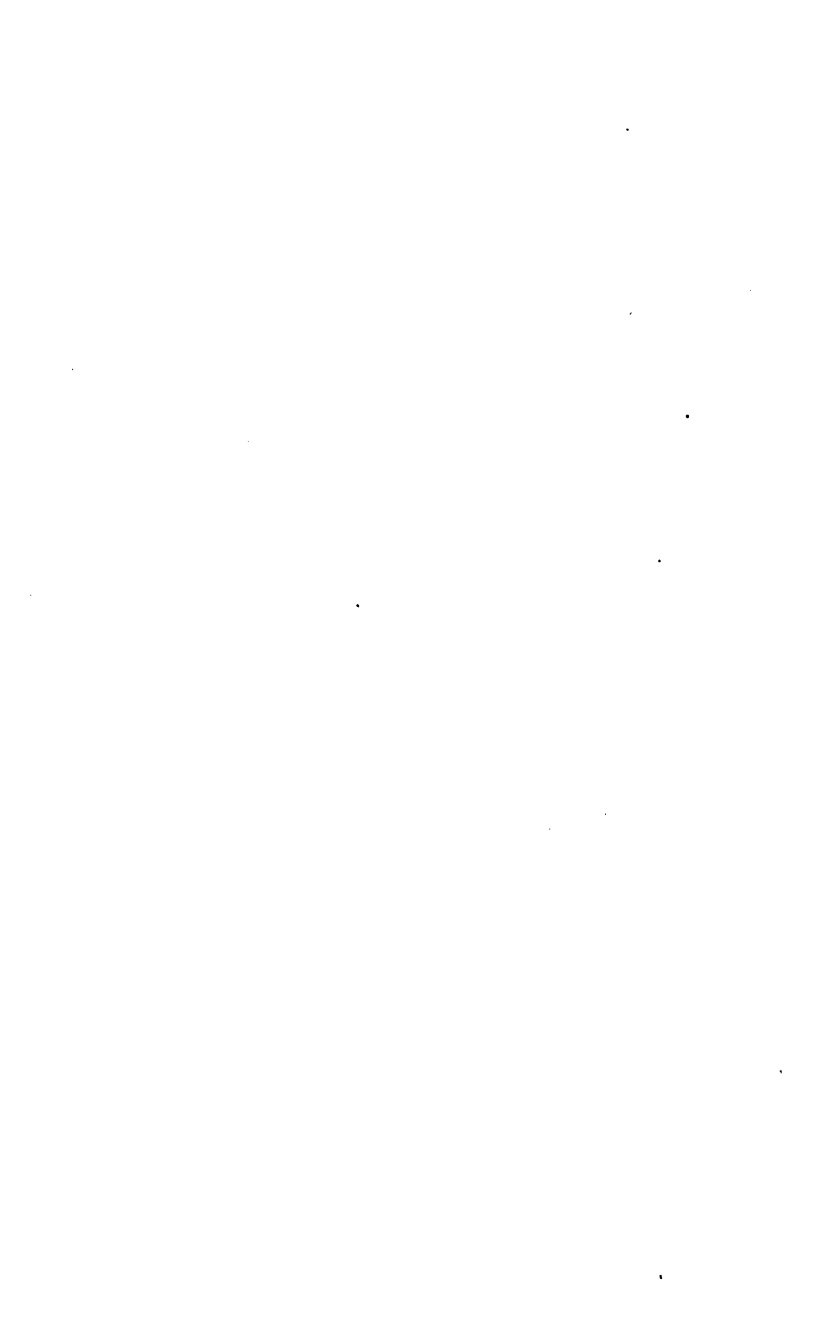
THE
HEART OF JANE WARNER
BY FLORENCE MARRYAT



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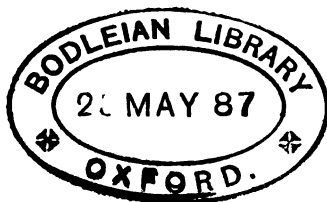
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THE HEART OF JANE WARNER.

CHAPTER I.

CHELSEA.

SOME twenty years ago there lived in an old-fashioned rambling cottage, in the greenest part of Chelsea, a lady, of the name of Warner and her daughter Jane. Mrs. Warner was the widow of a lieutenant in the Royal Navy, a fact of which she was inordinately proud. Indeed, so proud and so loving had the poor lady been, that when the lieutenant was lost at sea her mind, not strong by nature, gave way, and she remained (though neither mischievous nor dangerous) in a feeble and irresponsible condition ever afterwards. Her daughter Jane, at the time of her father's death, was a staid, sensible girl of fifteen, and quite capable, in the opinion of Mrs. Warner's friends, of assisting her mother to eke out the miserable pension which was all the lieutenant's death left them to live upon. So they established the mother and daughter in the Chelsea cottage, where Jane grew from girlhood to womanhood, with such education as books and her own thoughts could give her, and a knowledge of housekeeping and the best means of making a shilling do duty for two beyond her years.

The upper portion of the cottage was let in lodgings, and generally all the year round, for it was a sweet, quiet place to live in, and Jane made her lodgers so comfortable, they had no desire to move. At the time our story opens they had three permanent inmates, all of whom looked on the house as their home. The drawing-room floor was let to Mr. Wilfred Ewell, a clerk in Somerset House; and the one

above it to Mr. John Cobble, who was walking the hospitals ; whilst the room on the landing served as "parlour and bedroom and all" to Miss Prosser, a daily governess, who had made an arrangement to take her meals with the Warners. Jane was glad to secure such a companion for her mother, who occupied the dining-room, and who was never happy unless she had some one to chatter to about the deceased lieutenant. The room was decorated with trophies of her hero—his books and portraits, and the shells, stuffed birds, and other abominations which he had collected during his voyages for the edification of those at home.

Jane had no time to listen to her mother's oft-repeated stories of her father's gallantry, goodness, and courage. She had heard the account of his courtship of Mrs. Warner, and all the sweet things he had said on the occasion, *ad nauseam*, and was too much occupied with the duties of house cleaning and cooking (in which she had only one servant to assist her) to have leisure for such trivialities. And the girl had grave thoughts of her own to occupy her mind—thoughts in which her half-foolish mother could have no share. Jane never dreamt of placing any confidence in Mrs. Warner. The poor old lady was responsible to the extent of being trusted to buy and bring home a shilling's worth of eggs or a summer cabbage, but further than that she was as helpless, and wanted as much looking after, as a child. Jane was the mother and Mrs. Warner was the daughter, and a very troublesome daughter she was sometimes to manage. In all business or money transactions the girl had to think entirely for herself ; and so it had come to pass that at nineteen years old Jane Warner had the brain and the foresight of double her age.

But with respect to the management of her private affairs—to the prudence necessary where a woman's heart and future are concerned—she was ignorant as a child of ten. For that is the knowledge we gain from the experience of our mothers, and Jane had had no mother capable of teaching her to be circumspect and wary in her dealings with the other sex. She had grown up in the midst of her dreams, and lived in a fancy world, peopled by her own creations. She had never mixed in society, and had no opportunity of learning what men and women really are. Poor Mrs. Warner thought that, as the late lieutenant had been (in her eyes) an

angel, all other men must be the same, and it never entered her feeble brain for a moment to suppose that a young and handsome girl was not the most proper person to wait upon and look after the domestic comforts of two impressionable young men.

The old-fashioned, rambling cottage, which was surrounded by a green veranda, almost hidden in summer by honeysuckle and clematis and climbing roses, was set in the midst of a garden as old-fashioned and rambling as itself. How Jane Warner loved that garden! Her happiest moments had been passed in it, wandering through the shrubby paths by the light of the moon, and it was heaven to escape (if only for five minutes) from the heated kitchen and the smell of cooking, and to lose herself in her own thoughts amidst such pleasant surroundings. Is there anything in nature more charming than an old-world, irregular garden, in which no two beds are alike or match each other? The lawn in this one was ample, and shaded by two magnificent mulberry trees, for the enclosure had once formed part of the grounds attached to the palace of Cardinal Wolsey, and the episcopal arms were still to be seen over a door (now bricked up) which had once opened from the side wall. Jane was not rich enough to fill her garden annually with flaunting geraniums and calceolarias and lobelias, which was all the better, perhaps, for the preservation of its beauty, but it was well stocked with perennials, which bloomed year after year, and which she seemed to love more each time they appeared above the ground. The lilies of the valley which lined the wall, the purple irises and striped Indian grass, which seemed to grow as one plant, the pale blue periwinkles beneath the spreading ferns, the rich clove carnations, the creamy noisette roses—how carefully she tended and looked after them all! They were like pet animals or children to Jane Warner, and her chief amusement consisted in training her creepers and clipping her plants, and keeping the garden generally in the best order that she could. She thought all flowers so beautiful. She would not root up even a dandelion blooming amongst her ferns, or have the grass mown whilst the white daisies sprinkled it like stars. The only difference she was ever known to have with her mother was when Mrs. Warner plucked off the heads of flowers she did not wish to keep, and left them withering on the gravel path.

Jane revelled in her garden, and was impatient with anything that interfered with her enjoyment of it. What dreams she dreamt there, what ambitious hopes of a possible future, were best known to herself; but somehow they were all mixed up with her flowers.

It seemed to Jane as if no chance in life could separate her from that spot; and yet the girl was not quite happy. In her most cheerful moments there seemed to be some secret anxiety weighing on her spirits—some sad remembrance spoiling the curved beauty of her lips. She was serenely placid and self-possessed; but she never sang over her work, as befitted the light heart of nineteen, nor seemed to have any desire for the out-door amusements sought after at her age. She lived only in two things—the comfort and well-doing of her mother and her lodgers, and after that her garden, with, perhaps—who knows?—the dreams she dreamt there.

It was an evening in June, quiet and serene as herself, and Jane, the day's labour over, was watering her favourite flowers. She wore a black and white print dress, with a holland apron, and a broad-brimmed muslin hat; and she made a pretty picture as she stood there with the watering-pot in her uplifted hand. The purple and yellow flags reached to her knee; in the background stood a syringa-bush, snowy with its scented blossoms; whilst a trail of crimson roses, that last night's wind had detached from their trellised archway, hung down athwart her hat, and caught the muslin in its thorny stem. The rich fern-mould reeked with a warm aromatic odour as she scattered the water on it; and the pinks and stonecrop and London pride seemed to lift their tender blossoms to drink it as it fell. But the pleasantest thing there was Jane Warner herself—pleasant and handsome in the best acceptation of the term. It is not to be supposed that the girl was ignorant of her own good looks—what woman is?—but she knew no arts by which to heighten them. Her eyes were neither languid nor brilliant. She did not understand how to cast down her lids in affected shyness, nor to flash a glance upon a man so as to bring him to her feet. She might have done so easily if she had chosen; but Jane was above such artifices, and would have scorned to use them. She looked her friends full in the face, without flinching, from a pair of bluest blue eyes, fringed with black

lashes, and surmounted by strongly-marked brows. Her hair was of a warm brown, many shades lighter than her lashes, and her complexion was rather delicate than pale. But the strength of Jane Warner's character lay in her mouth—a handsome mouth, with closed lips and firm chin, and a stability of purpose underlying its natural sweetness which she never inherited from her weak-minded mother.

As she watered her plants, raising her head every now and then as if to listen for a coming step, the signs of her responsible position were evident upon her person. A bag-pocket, with her household keys and money, dangled from her waist; a needle and thread stuck in the front of her dress; whilst a tradesman's book, which the servant had given her as she passed to the garden, peeped out, like a lover's letter, from her bosom.

Presently a little person, fantastically dressed, came ambling along the garden-paths, and Mrs. Warner stood beside her daughter. It was difficult to look at them and believe they were parent and child. Jane towered inches above her mother's head, and her regular features bore no resemblance whatever to Mrs. Warner's turned-up nose and round bird-like eyes. The elder lady, too, wore a dress of many colours, and a wonderful cap, manufactured by herself. Her daughter had tried hard to regulate her dress, in order to prevent her being peculiar; but, finding it made her mother unhappy and discontented, she permitted her to have her own way. She appeared on the present occasion in a bright blue dress, trimmed with red, and embellished by an enormous lace collar. Her cap was ornamented with every artificial flower and morsel of ribbon she could lay her hands on; and in the front of it was stuck a large brooch, formed of a painting on ivory of the temple at Tanjore—one of the lieutenant's last gifts to her, and which the poor old lady regarded as a species of amulet or charm. She was never seen without this brooch placed in some part or other of her dress; and her latest craze was that, if she parted with it for a single hour, some harm would happen to the lieutenant—for her madness had taken the happy form of refusing to believe her husband was dead; and sometimes Jane was unable to persuade her to stir out of the house for days together, under the impression that he might return while she was away.

As she approached her daughter's side on that June evening, Jane saw she had some new crotchet in her addled brain, from the way in which she looked around her, with her finger to her lips.

"Jane," she commenced mysteriously, "Miss Prosser is not in."

"Well, mother! and what of that?"

"It is six o'clock. The tea is on the table. Sarah brought it in half an hour ago."

"And you want your tea, poor mother!" said the girl affectionately, "Why did you not call me before? There is no need for you to wait for Miss Prosser."

"But it is six o'clock, Jane."

"Well! she is often detained, you know that. Perhaps Lady Brooke has a dinner-party, and has asked her to remain with the children. She will be home to supper. But you must not wait for your cup of tea a minute longer."

And Jane put her arm round Mrs. Warner's waist, and tried to draw her towards the house. But the old lady stood still upon the path and refused to stir.

"Jane," she said solemnly, "don't trifle upon such a subject. Have you forgotten that I expect your dear father to arrive at any moment—that this very evening he may be here? And Miss Prosser does not return! Perhaps she has gone to meet him. The thought disturbs me greatly. I have been very kind to Miss Prosser. I have talked a great deal to her of your dear father's goodness and beauty. Do you think I talk *too* much of his goodness and beauty, Jane?"

"Perhaps you do, dear, sometimes. The subject is not so interesting, you know, to other people as it is to you and me."

"But that is impossible, Jane. Everyone must be interested to hear of your dear father. He is one of the handsomest men in England, you know, and certainly the best. Can women fall in love with men of whom they have only heard, Jane?"

"I don't think so, mother," replied the girl cheerfully. "I never met with such a case."

"It would distress me very much if I thought I had been the means of making Miss Prosser fall in love with your dear father, Jane, for she will only be disappointed. Your father is such a good man, and so devoted to me. When he asked me to be his wife—I remember it as plainly as if it had hap-

pened yesterday—we were sitting in your grandfather's porch, and the honeysuckle——”

“Yes! mother, yes!” interposed Jane, as she made a forcible effort to induce the old lady to move; “but you must come in now and have your tea, and you shall finish the story of father's courtship afterwards.”

“But, Jane,” replied her mother, twisting round and round upon the gravel path, as she walked, like a human teetotum, “it was a most remarkable thing that your dear father picked a branch of honeysuckle and said——”

“Mother, if you don't come in at once the evening air will ruin the painting on your beautiful brooch,” said Jane, using the most forcible argument she could think of.

Mrs. Warner immediately clapped her hands to her brooch with a cry of dismay, and trotted into the house. Her daughter followed with a sigh.

There is nothing more wearying to any age than the constant companionship with an unhinged mind.

Once settled at her tea-tray, however, Mrs. Warner fell into a more reasonable mood. She was given, at such moments, to assume a managerial and dictatorial air with her daughter, which would have been highly amusing had it not been so sad, and which Jane bore with the utmost submission.

The subject which started her this evening was the accidental mention of Mr. Ewell's name.

“Where is Mr. Ewell, Jane?” demanded the old lady.

“I don't know, mother.”

“Don't know? Then you ought to know. The young man has been absent from home for two or three days.”

“He has been absent a fortnight to-morrow,” said her daughter, with another sigh.

“You have no business to let him stay away so long. He will get up to mischief. Young men are not to be trusted. If he were like your dear father——”

“What right have I, mother, to question the comings and goings of Mr. Ewell, or anybody else? He has rich relations, perhaps he is staying with them. You know he often goes to his cousin, Sir Robert Ewell, of Lambscote.”

“I don't believe it, Jane! He has left the cottage because you put clean sheets on his bed.”

“My dear mother!”

"It is the truth ; I saw you do it. The best linen sheets, too. Why is Mr. Ewell to have linen sheets and Mr. Cobble only cotton ?"

The girl laughed, though uneasily.

"I thought the best sheets should go with the best floor. However, I will equalize my favours in future."

"And you darn his socks, too," continued Mrs. Warner in a tone of injury, pointing to her daughter's workbasket ; "and Miss Prosser says she would be only too thankful to be helped with her needlework."

"I never undertook to help Miss Prosser," interrupted Jane proudly.

"And, as I told her," went on the old lady, "*when* do you ever mend or make anything for your dear father ? He will expect it, you know, Jane, when he comes home. You think he *will* come home, don't you, my dear ?" she continued, in a coaxing voice. "You really believe that I may expect to see your dear father, if not this evening, at least very soon ?"

"I believe we shall all be together again before long, dear mother," replied her daughter, as she rose and kissed her.

At that moment a postman's knock sounded on the door, and, hurrying through the hall, Jane received a letter addressed to herself, and hid it in the pocket of her apron before she returned to the dining-room.

There was no need. Mrs. Warner's temporary fit of natural curiosity had already evaporated, and she was busily employed dusting the shells and stuffed birds and talking to the portrait of her husband as if it had been a sentient thing ; so Jane found no difficulty in escaping once more to the garden, and there devouring the contents of her letter. It did not take long to read, but it contained startling intelligence.

"MY DEAREST JANE,—

"I have been so full of business the last week I have had no time to write to you ; but I shall be home to-morrow or next day, if only for an hour. I have unexpected news for you. My cousin, Sir Robert, and his boy, were carried off by diphtheria, within a few hours of each other, last week. This event, as you will guess, brings the title

and estates to me ; but I beg you will not mention the circumstance in the house until I have seen you.

"I remain, yours lovingly,
"W. E.

"P.S.—By-the-way, if that brute Knowles comes bothering about his bill again, refer him to Mr. Parfitt, 33, Commentary Inn. And send me a couple of clean shirts and etceteras to the Albany Hotel in a cab, as soon as ever you receive this, there's a dear girl."

Jane read this epistle more than once before she fully comprehended the astounding fact it conveyed to her, and the difference that fact made in the fortunes of Wilfrid Ewell.

"*A baronet!*" she kept on repeating wonderingly to herself, whilst the night moths flew about her, and the dark rapidly blurred the characters she had been perusing. "*A baronet!—Sir Wilfrid Ewell!*—and to live at that lovely place, Lambcote, of which he has told me so much! and to have all Sir Robert's carriages and horses and hothouses! Oh, it seems too good to be true! I *cannot* believe it!"

And then her thoughts turned with womanly compassion and tenderness to the dead man, whom she had never seen, and his young widow.

"Poor Sir Robert!" she whispers softly, whilst the tears rose to her eyes. "How sad for Lady Ewell to lose him and her little boy both in one day! How miserable she must be! I wonder Will says so little of them both. He has such a kind heart, surely he must feel his cousin's sudden death. Perhaps he feels it so much he has not the courage to put his feelings into words. How I wish it was in my power to do anything to comfort Lady Ewell now."

But here Jane's mind, always practical, remembered her correspondent's request for clean shirts, and she went upstairs and packed the articles, and carried them herself to the nearest cab-stand, lest the servant should decipher the new address and talk about it. And, as she walked back in the dark, there was a new light (which might almost have been deemed triumphant) in her eyes as she kept on repeating to herself:

"Sir Wilfrid Ewell, of Lambcote! Sir Wilfrid and Lady Ewell of Lambcote! Oh, it is impossible! It cannot be true! It will be days and days before I am able to believe it."

CHAPTER II.

CHANGES.

THE advent of these unexpected honours seemed almost as incredible to the recipient of them as to Jane Warner. The fathers of the deceased baronet and Wilfrid Ewell had been brothers ; but, according to the unjust English law of primogeniture, the title and estates and fortune had all descended to the eldest son, whilst the younger had been put into the Church to struggle on as best he could. This younger son—Wilfrid's father—had died about a year before, having left a widow, and a family of daughters, and been unable to do anything more for his only son than to see him firmly established in Somerset House as a clerk on a salary of one hundred and fifty pounds a year. And Wilfrid Ewell had never dreamt of being anything better or higher than a civil servant. His cousin Robert was a remarkable specimen of healthy manhood. He was a young man of eight-and-twenty, married to the woman he loved—the father of a son and daughter, and with every prospect of becoming the father of a dozen more. What man in his senses could have built any hopes of succession on such a basis ? Wilfrid Ewell certainly did not ; and when the news was suddenly conveyed to him that a few short hours had quenched the lives of both the young baronet and his son, and bestowed on himself a title, lands, and money, he turned sick and faint with the shock it gave him, and the overwhelming knowledge of the change in his fortunes. He was only twenty-two, though rather old and *blasé* for his age, as young men left to their own devices in London are apt to be ; and with one turn of the wheel the fickle goddess had transformed him from a Government drudge to an independent man. It was enough to turn a stronger head than Wilfrid Ewell's. These sudden changes and chances in our lives—how wonderful they are to contemplate ! The wealth which by no amount of energy we could have compassed for ourselves ; the position after which we have striven for years ; the success we have panted for, yet despaired to obtain ; the love we have sighed after, but which seemed so far beyond

our reach! All these things come to us sometimes in the most unexpected manner, dropping into our laps without the slightest trouble; and for a few hours—or a few days, perhaps—our senses reel, and we cannot realize what we have gained. And then the rich man grows accustomed to his riches and wants more; the lover marries his wife and finds her rather less desirable than other women; the public favourite grows greedy of applause, and votes his patrons unappreciative and ungrateful. *Sic transit.* And so did Wilfrid Ewell become so accustomed in the course of a few weeks to be styled “Sir Wilfrid,” that it seemed the most natural thing in the world to him that his robust young cousin should have dropped like a ripe plum from the tree at eight-and-twenty, and left him to step into his shoes. But he was not yet accustomed to it.

The morning following his letter to Jane Warner, he walked by appointment into the office of the solicitor, Mr. Parfitt, and was received by that gentleman with open arms.

“My dear Sir Wilfrid, charmed to see you! So sorry I was out when you called yesterday. Come about making some arrangement with regard to Lambscote, I conclude? Ah! yes. Quite right. Had a letter from the widow this morning, poor young creature! Very sad, of course; but these things are to be expected—eh, Sir Wilfrid?”

Sir Wilfrid coloured as he heard himself addressed.

“Well, *I* didn’t expect it, Mr. Parfitt. Poor Bob was always so healthy and well, you know. I am sure the last time I was staying at Lambscote he reminded me more of Harry the Eighth than of any one else.”

“Ah! corpulent—rosy—full habit—determination of blood to the head. A constitution very much to be avoided, Sir Wilfrid. I am glad to observe that you don’t take after the late baronet in that particular.”

“No; I have always been spare enough if that is any indication of health. But with respect to Lambscote, Mr. Parfitt.”

“Ah! with respect to Lambscote, Sir Wilfrid. You want to know how soon you can take possession? Very natural. But I have thought it was hardly time to moot the question to Lady Ewell. The poor creature is naturally cut up about this affair, and being so soon after the funerals——”

“I should have thought the sooner she left the place,

the sooner she'd forget it," replied Sir Wilfrid, flicking the dust from his mourning trousers with his ebony cane.

As he leant back in the office chair, he made a handsome picture, though a very selfish one. He possessed that type of face which can only be termed beautiful, even though it belongs to a man. His languid eyes, olive complexion, and dark air, gave him the appearance of an Italian, to which his small hands and feet and graceful figure greatly contributed. But there was a conscious look of self-satisfaction lurking about the thin lips of his rather feebly-formed mouth that went far, in the eyes of unbiassed judges, to spoil his good looks. In fact, he carried his character—a character so selfish and weak as to run the risk of degenerating into cruelty—on his features. Had it not been so, his thoughts would have dwelt very compassionately—notwithstanding a natural exultation—on the sad calamity which had occasioned his good luck. He had received so much kindness and hospitality at the hands of his cousin Robert and his good little wife, that he might have devoted a sigh or two to the thought of what *she* must be passing through, in having to leave her home, and retire into solitude with her infant daughter. But he did not. No vision came back to his mind of a scene he had witnessed at Lambscote but one short month ago—when he had stood upon the lawn beneath the flowering chestnut trees, laughing with Lady Ewell to see the little children leading their father about the grass on all fours, with a chain of daisies to pretend he was a bear. The chain of daisies was soon broken, and left upon the grass to die; and the chain of love between the husband and the wife seemed to have been ruptured almost as easily. But their kinsman and successor was only troubled about one thing—how soon could he in decency enter upon possession of Lambscote Hall? The knowledge of his wealth had been like the taste of blood to the untried tiger. He longed—oh! so eagerly—to try, without delay, what it felt like to be a rich and independent man.

"Of course I don't wish to hurry Lady Ewell," he said to Mr. Parfitt; "but still I should have thought that she would be rather glad than otherwise to be quit of a place that must remind her of the past."

"True—very true," acquiesced the solicitor. "But it is usual to allow a month or two in these cases, you know. But that will not inconvenience you, Sir Wilfrid, surely. You

will hardly leave town during the season ; and as for funds, of course you can draw on me as you choose."

"Yes, I suppose so. But I don't think I shall remain in London a day longer than I need. I have too often been compelled to stay in it against my will. And—and there are others to consult beside myself in the matter."

"Ah ! your mother, no doubt, Sir Wilfrid, and your sisters. Five of them, are there not ? You see, I was a friend of your late father for years, and know all about the family. Pity he did not live to see this day. I am sure you will agree with me in that. And directly I heard you had come into the title, I knew your first thought would be for your mother and sisters. They will help to fill the Hall nicely, Sir Wilfrid, and take all the trouble of it off your hands."

At this suggestion the new Baronet looked uneasy, and shifted his seat.

"Yes, yes !" he stammered ; "of course I shall hope to see my family very often at Lambscote, as visitors, you understand, Mr. Parfitt—visitors. But a man does not want to live with his mother and sisters for ever, and—and——"

The old man looked at the young man slyly.

"I *do* understand, Sir Wilfrid, perfectly—perfectly ; and a very right resolution, too. You are of an age to do, sir, as you think of doing, and the inheritance of such a titled fortune as yours brings the responsibility of marriage with it. Poor Sir Robert thought so, and you must think the same. You must not let the name become extinct, Sir Wilfrid, and there is no one to take it after yourself unless you leave sons behind you. It becomes a duty, sir, a duty. And if you will let me further advise you, being so much your elder and your late father's friend, I should say, don't be afraid of looking too high. There is many a lord's daughter who would be proud and happy to become the mistress of Lambscote, and you have a title fit to rank with the best in the land."

"Yes, Mr. Parfitt ; but—but——"

"I can't allow of any *buts* in your case, Sir Wilfrid. Now, there's Lady Louisa Marvel, daughter of the Duke of Miracle, just married to Lieutenant Busby of the Fusiliers—a man without a penny beyond his pay. I drew up the marriage settlement, and very handsomely the Duke has dowered Lady Louisa. And if Mr. Busby can secure such a prize, why not *you*, sir, why not you ?"

"Only there is an obstacle in the way," said Sir Wilfrid awkwardly, "and that is, Mr. Parfitt, that *I am already married.*"

The solicitor bounced in his chair like an india-rubber, with surprise.

"*Married!* Sir Wilfrid! married! Bless my heart and soul! You have positively taken away my breath with surprise."

"You may well say so. It takes away my own sometimes only to think of it."

"But when did it happen, Sir Wilfrid?"

"Two years ago."

"And none of your family are aware of it?"

"Not one. I was afraid to tell my father, who held very rigid opinions on such matters, and would certainly have withdrawn the small assistance he rendered me had he heard of it. And since his death where was the use of disclosing it? I had not the means to introduce my wife into society, and we were perfectly happy as we were. Now, however, circumstances render it imperative that I should acknowledge her, and make our marriage public. She is, of course, Lady Ewell, and must take her place in the world according to her rank.

The solicitor was leaning back in his chair playing thoughtfully with a paper-knife.

"I am sorry to hear this, Sir Wilfrid, very sorry, because I presume—forgive me if I offend you, sir—that (as you did not care to announce your marriage to your late father) Lady Ewell is not, perhaps, *quite* in the same position as yourself."

"She is not," replied the young man curtly.

"I am *very* sorry," repeated the lawyer; "*very sorry indeed.*"

"Look here, Mr. Parfitt," said Sir Wilfrid, "you were my father's and my cousin's friend, and I will make a clean breast to you. You know where I have been living for the last three years, down at Chelsea, at a place called Wolsey Cottage, kept by a lady named Warner and her daughter? It's the daughter—you understand—I married her two years ago."

"God bless my soul! How did it come about?"

"I can hardly tell you how it came about. She's pretty, and I flirted with her naturally; and one day I thought

matters had gone too far, and I had compromised myself to marriage. It was no use asking my parents' consent, and she has only a mother, who is perfectly mad, and no one dreams of consulting her about anything. So we took the matter into our own hands and walked into a church and got married."

"But my dear sir, you were not of age," exclaimed Mr. Parfitt, with aroused interest. "I think I am right in saying you are two-and-twenty at the present moment."

"Of course I wasn't of age. If I had been I would have married Miss Warner openly. But I was only twenty, and she seventeen, so we took French leave."

"And how, then, did you procure the license?" inquired the lawyer.

At this question the new Baronet grew very red.

"That was the most awkward part of the business, Mr. Parfitt. You see, I was quite ignorant of such matters, and when I applied for a license, I found I had to declare that we were both of age. There was no other way of getting it. I had already decided to be married under my Christian names only, of *Wilfrid Stanley*, so that my father might not get wind of it, so the license was made out accordingly. It was very foolish and very wrong. I see that now; but at the time I was so much in love that I would have sworn anything in order to obtain my own way."

"You took a false oath, in fact, Sir Wilfrid."

"I did. I feel very much ashamed to confess it, but I looked upon the whole matter as a mere form, and of no consequence to anyone but ourselves. And no more, I suppose, it is."

"Not from a moral point of view, sir, certainly; but looked at legally——"

"What of it, looked at legally?"

"Simply this, that it is no marriage at all!"

"*What!*" cried Wilfrid Ewell, with the utmost astonishment.

"I repeat it, sir. A marriage entered into by minors, without the consent of parents or guardians, and under an assumed name, is invalid. Let me convince you of the truth of what I assert, before we proceed any further in the business."

And whilst Sir Wilfrid passed his handkerchief across his brow, Mr. Parfitt reached down an ominous-looking book of legal reference, and ran his fingers rapidly through the pages.

CHAPTER III.

VOID.

"Yes, yes! I thought so—I knew it," exclaimed the lawyer, as he came to a full stop, and screwed his lips together. "Pray, was the lady—Miss Warner—aware that you married her under an assumed name, Sir Wilfrid?" he inquired after an awkward pause.

"Of course she was! I had no secrets from her. She knew my father would object to the marriage as well as I did, and thought it better, since we had both made up our minds, not to run the risk of a refusal. Why do you ask the question?"

"Merely because it decides the matter, sir. Here is the very case itself, as plain as can be. 'Augustus Henry Edward Stanhope, a minor, was married as Edward Stanhope only, in order to conceal the marriage from his father. The fraud upon the father caused a declaration of nullity.'"

"How very awkward. I never dreamt of such a thing," said the baronet.

"But wait, Sir Wilfrid, wait. The Stanhope case was only a voidable marriage. Yours with Miss Warner is actually *void*. Let me convince you. Here is the law itself. 'A marriage is absolutely null and void to all intents and purposes if it can be proved that *both* the parties at the time of solemnisation were guilty of or fully cognisant of any wilful, essential informality, either in the authority to marry or in the declaration made to procure the authority, or that *both* the parties connived in, or were fully aware of, any wilful omission or illegality in the solemnization.' † There it is, you see, Sir Wilfrid," continued Mr. Parfitt, as he peered over his spectacles at his client, "as plainly set forth as it is possible to do it; and if you want further evidence, I can give it you under the head of 'False Declarations.'"

"No, no! don't trouble yourself. I am convinced that you

* See Beeton's Legal Handbook, No. III.

† See Beeton's Legal Handbook, No. II.

are right," replied the young man; "but I can't see that it can make any difference to me now. My father is dead, and there is no one else to dispute the legality of my marriage."

"It is not a marriage, Sir Wilfrid," retorted the lawyer. "Forgive me if I seem warm on the subject, but I cannot hear you call it so, and remain silent. You have never been properly married to Miss Warner. You have been simply living with her."

Sir Wilfrid coloured deeply at the accusation.

"I am extremely sorry to hear it, but it was not done wilfully, and, as I said before, no one has a right to dispute my marriage with her now."

"Except yourself, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"That you could set aside this marriage to-morrow without the slightest trouble—in fact, that you are as free to marry as if you had never seen the lady under discussion. You would not even have need to appeal to the law; you are at this moment absolutely free."

"Do you think I am a villain?" exclaimed Sir Wilfrid, starting in his chair.

"My dear Sir Wilfrid, pray be reasonable. I am your legal adviser, and it is my business to tell you what is the law, and what is not. You might as well find fault with your doctor for attempting to direct your regimen."

"True! You must forgive my hastiness, Mr. Parfitt, but this intelligence has upset me. Well, I suppose the only thing to be done is for me to marry Lady Ewell——"

"Miss Warner, Sir Wilfrid," interposed the lawyer blandly. Sir Wilfrid laughed.

"Miss Warner, then, if you will have it so, over again. It can be done without any fuss or publicity—can't it? I mean, without letting the world know it has been done before."

"Certainly, sir—if you are determined to renew the contract."

"Of course I am determined. What else could I do?"

"Well, under the circumstances, considering the lady's position in life, and that you have, in fact, never been married to her, I think most men would find plenty of other things to do. However, that is not my business, Sir Wilfrid. No doubt, your heart is set upon the matter, and of course

you are the best judge of your own actions. But I cannot help feeling sorry—for your father's sake, as well as your own. A lodging-house keeper's daughter is not the wife for Sir Wilfrid Ewell, nor the mistress for Lambscote Hall. You should have looked higher, my dear young friend—if you will permit me to call you so—much, *much* higher."

"But look here, Parfitt," returned Sir Wilfrid awkwardly, "she is not exactly what you say, you know. It is true that her mother lets part of her house, but her father was as good a gentleman as mine; at least, I have never heard anything to the contrary—a lieutenant in the Royal Navy, and——"

"It is the *associations*, my dear sir—the associations of a lifetime that make a man or a woman. Miss Warner *may* be, by birth, a lady, but I appeal to your common-sense to say if it is fit that *your* wife should have passed her youth in superintending the cookery department, and answering the bell."

Sir Wilfrid, remembering the many occasions on which Jane had not only superintended, but cooked, his chop, and cleaned his rooms with her own hands, blushed, and was silent.

"You agree with me, Sir Wilfrid!"

"I certainly agree with you so far, Mr. Parfitt, that had I known what my rank and position in life were to be, I should have thought twice before I married Miss Warner. But I was only a clerk in Somerset House, you see, without hope of anything better, and I considered we were much on a par. And it would be unmanly to draw back now, just because a quibble of the law permits me to do so."

"Perhaps it would, Sir Wilfrid. But since matters have gone so far, I wouldn't hurry on the legal marriage, if I were you; let things bide for a while. The world has not yet swallowed the fact that you are a wealthy baronet; let it have breathing-time before you astonish it with a less welcome piece of intelligence."

"You think county families would be inclined to resent my marriage with Miss Warner, then?"

"I don't want to wound your feelings more than necessary, but my own belief is that she will not be received amongst them; they are very particular and very stiff down in Somersetshire. They will require to know all about Lady Ewell's birth and antecedents before they open their doors to her as they did to Sir Robert's wife."

"Then they'll have to keep them shut," replied Sir Wilfrid

hotly. "However, I shall take your advice, Mr. Parfitt, and let things rest as they are, until I see you again. I shall not even mention the matter at home, except to enjoin secrecy on my—on Miss Warner. I shall go down to Chelsea this evening; but I shall look in upon you most probably to-morrow. And you don't think I can take possession of Lambcote, then, with decency, under a month?"

"It is the usual thing, Sir Wilfrid—the usual thing," replied the lawyer, rubbing his hands; "but I will write to Lady Ewell to-night, and learn her intentions. And, meanwhile, you had better take some furnished chambers in town for the season; I know of a charming set in the Adelphi just vacant. That cottage at Chelsea is no longer a fit residence for you, Sir Wilfrid; besides, you must show yourself in society. The world will be anxious to see how you bear your new honours."

"All right, Parfitt; we will speak of this again to-morrow. Chelsea is a deuce of a way off, and chambers will certainly be more convenient for me whilst I have so much business to transact; so have all particulars concerning them ready for me to look into when I call again. Good-morning."

"Good-morning, Sir Wilfrid—good-morning!" said the lawyer, as he accompanied the new baronet to the outer office, and opened the door for him with his own hands.

It was a false pride, but Wilfrid Ewell could not help feeling proud as he walked through it, with the clerks bowing to him on every side. Which of them would have bowed to him a month ago, if he had been sent to Mr. Parfitt with a message from Somerset House? But to be a baronet with a fine estate, and a rent-roll of seven thousand a year, was a very different thing!

The man was just the same, but nobody would think so. And neither did outward objects appear just the same in the eyes of the newly-made Baronet as they had done to those of Wilfrid Ewell; and this fact struck him more forcibly than ever as he walked up to the door of the cottage in Chelsea that evening. The creepers grew in their old luxuriance, flinging their fragrance without stint upon the air; the cool breeze from the river stirred the muslin curtains at the open windows, and filled his nostrils with the scent of roses and honeysuckle—everything was clean and fresh and sweet as ever, yet everything seemed changed.

The cottage walls looked dingy, and as if they needed paint; the cry of welcome from the old parrot swinging in his cage in the veranda sounded like a discordant shriek. Mrs. Warner's fantastic dress, as she appeared for an instant at the window, looked the essence of vulgarity; even Jane, who ran to the door to welcome him with her grave, sweet smile, seemed more like a servant than she had ever done before.

He took her by the hand, but he did not kiss her. These married lovers had been compelled, from fear of discovery, to put a very strong control upon their words and actions, so that Jane neither expected nor desired such a demonstration on his part. But she *was* disappointed to see him enter with a frown upon his handsome face, just when she had thought it would be overbrimming with his new happiness.

"Oh, Will!" she exclaimed in a kind of whispered gasp as their hands met.

"Why do you wear that thing," he answered, pointing to her Holland apron. "You know I hate it."

"Oh, my poor apron! I quite forgot to take it off, I was in such a hurry to let you in. But Sarah was obliged to go out shopping this afternoon—poor mother's head seems so queer from this heat I couldn't trust her, so I have had to clean your rooms myself. And they *were* so dirty. I can't think where all the dirt comes from. Shall I pay the cab. Will? What is it? Two shillings? You go upstairs, There's no one in the house but me and another, and I'll come to you as soon as I've settled with the cabman."

"No, no!" exclaimed Sir Wilfrid, pushing her back into the hall. "When will you learn, Jane, that it's not your place to do such things? Go and get off that apron, there's a dear girl, and let me see you looking more like yourself."

He walked down the garden-path as he spoke and as soon as his back was turned Jane seized his portmanteau, which had been deposited in the hall, in her strong young arms and carried it bodily upstairs.

When Sir Wilfrid Ewell entered his sitting-room, he found her divested of the apron and quietly arranging her hair before his looking-glass, as if she had done nothing out of the common way.

"Did you bring up my portmanteau?" he inquired curtly.

"Of course I did Will. Who else? Haven't I done it scores of times before?"

"But always against my wish, Jane, as you will acknowledge; and in future it will be against my orders. I cannot have you degraded to the position of a maid of all work."

He had thrown himself in an armchair when he entered the room, and the girl went up to him and knelt beside his knee.

"Then I won't do it again, Will, you know I won't. But I cannot think it a degradation to wait upon you. I have done it for so long. It would seem quite unnatural to me to sit still and let somebody else attend to all your wants."

He was touched by her answer, and folding his arms about her, kissed her upon the brow and lips.

Jane's cheeks flushed crimson, like the heart of a rose, beneath those kisses. She was not a demonstrative person by any manner of means. She was not of the leaning, clinging, bearing-to-the-ground order of woman. She had her own ideas and her own opinions of wrong and right, and she could stand alone and independent, and liked to do so.

Kisses, and soft words, and fulsome flattery would never have had the power to win her love, as they do that of so many of her sex. She had only valued them as proofs of an affection founded on something higher. But she loved Wilfrid Ewell with all the strength of her strong heart, and a caress or a kind word from him had the power to shake her to the very centre.

She had never told him so. She had never angled for his kisses, nor pressed her own upon him—that was not Jane's way—but they were all the dearer to her because they were not too common.

In like manner she had never really confessed to her husband the magnitude of her love for him. She showed it by every action of her life, and he knew it was there, and had been quite content hitherto to let her wait upon him and keep his wardrobe in order, and cook dainty dishes to please his appetite, and had never dreamt but that such things came within the category of a wife's duties. But now, with the strange light which his rank and riches shed upon every familiar object, Jane's old attentions had become something wrong, and Sir Wilfrid's kisses were but a prelude to innoculating her with the new doctrine which she was thenceforth to adopt.

CHAPTER IV.

JANE.

"Did you get the shirts all right, Will?" asked the girl affectionately, thinking more of his personal comfort than her own prospects, as her hand wandered caressingly amongst his dark hair.

"Oh yes. I was awfully sorry to trouble you, Jane, but it shall not happen another time."

"It was no trouble, dear. I did not know, of course, that you would be so long away, or I would have put you up more. But I carried them down to the cab-stand myself; ten minutes after I received your letter.

The young man frowned.

"Why did you take them yourself? Why couldn't the servant have carried them? When will you learn that ladies are not in the habit of doing manual labour?"

Jane opened her eyes.

"Oh, Will! I did it for fear Sarah might read your new name. You told me to keep it a secret until we met. But now, I suppose that all the world may hear it."

"Indeed they may not. That is to say, they *must* hear it sooner or later, of course; but I don't want it blurted out with a flourish of trumpets. There is nothing so odious as to become the object of vulgar curiosity."

"But you will tell *me* all about it, won't you, Will?" said Jane coaxingly from her seat on the arm of his chair. "You can fancy how anxious I am to hear the whole story. It seems too wonderful to believe that this grand new baronet, with his estates and his money, can possibly be *my husband*."

Sir Wilfrid looked annoyed at the term she used, and glanced round the room anxiously.

"How incautious you are, Jane. How often have I begged you not to use that name even in private. The door is ajar, and you never know who may not be listening."

"But, my darling," laughed the girl, jumping up and slamming the offending door, "I have told you already there is no one in the house except poor mother. Besides, everyone

must know it *now*, surely! We can't go on like this when you take possession of Lambcote, Will."

"Certainly not; but I cannot take possession for some time to come. Mr. Parfitt, my solicitor, tells me it is usual in these cases to allow the widow to choose her own time for vacating the premises—that is, within a month or two. Awful nuisance, isn't it? But it's always the way in this world. You can't get a stroke of good luck without some worry to counter-balance it."

"Oh, don't call it a worry, Will! Think how completely unexpected our good fortune was—how different it is to be a rich man, from toiling at a desk all your life—and nothing will be a worry to you. And poor Lady Ewell, too! A month will seem a very short time for her to give it all up in. Tell me more about her, Will. Is she nice and pretty? and will she—*can* she be Lady Ewell still, as well as—as——"

"As well as yourself! Yes; you are both Lady Ewell, now! She is the Dowager Lady Ewell, and you the reigning one."

"How strange—how very strange—it seems," replied the girl thoughtfully; "but I am so ignorant of such things. I have never been thrown in the way of lords and ladies and such high people before."

Her husband sighed.

"Naturally not; but you are quick and intelligent, and will soon know all about them. You asked if the Dowager Lady Ewell is nice and pretty. Yes, she is considered so; but we are not likely to see much of each other. She is the daughter of General Ridley, and goes home to her father, taking five hundred a year from the estate till her death, which is another nuisance, but cannot be avoided. My widow will do the same if I die without male heirs."

"Don't talk of dying, Will," said Jane, with a shudder.

"All right, dear. I am only putting the case before you. Until the widow chooses to leave Lambcote, however, I must remain in London, and I can't remain here."

"Not *here*? Oh, Will, dear, where shall we go?"

"I didn't say 'we,' Jane. I have no intention of taking you away from Chelsea, at all events for the present. But I shall have a great deal of business to transact during the next few weeks, and I must have rooms at the West-end. Parfitt is looking out for some for me, and I am to see them to-morrow."

"What *shall* I do without you—perhaps for a couple of months?" said the girl wearily. "The last fortnight has been such a fearful drag. I don't know what to do with myself, Will, when I haven't your meals to get ready, and your linen to look out, and your rooms to keep neat and clean. I have been dreaming half my time away in the garden, thinking of you and when you would come back. And now to look forward to the same thing for two whole months. Oh, it will be terrible!"

"Just as bad for me as for you," he answered carelessly; "but I have to endure it. Make the best of it, as I do, Jane. You see everybody will be wanting to speak to me now. My mother has written twice already for me to go down to Surbiton, and several of my father's old friends have sent letters and cards for me to Parfitt's office. It is quite necessary I should have a proper place to receive my visitors in."

"Of course," acquiesced Jane, who knew nothing of social etiquette; "and I must remain here then, Will?"

"For the present, my dear, certainly. You see, Jane, I am rather in an awkward predicament. I have passed everywhere for a bachelor; and to go now and tell the world, without any preparation, that I am a married man, would call down so many comments and inquiries, that I confess myself unequal to the task of combating them. I have told Parfitt all about it, and he seriously advises our keeping the matter dark, until my business is finally settled."

"You have told Mr. Parfitt that we are married!" exclaimed Jane.

"Yes; I gave him every particular."

"Oh! what did he say?"

"He thought we had been very foolish and very imprudent, naturally—everyone would say that, and——"

"Oh, Will!" interrupted the girl eagerly, "I wonder if it was too foolish! I have been thinking so much about it since I received your letter, and worrying myself with the idea that if we had not been so rash, you might have found some one else more suited to your rank and station. But never one to love you better, darling—never a more faithful and constant wife than I shall be to you."

"Don't talk rubbish, Jane, and don't get sentimental. When people are married they're married, and there's an

end of it ; and it is of no use speculating what they would have done if they had never seen each other. There's no doubt we plunged into matrimony with our eyes shut ; but we've been very good friends since, and I don't think we've regretted it much—at least, *I* haven't."

"And you know *I* haven't, Will. You know at that time that nothing would have persuaded me to leave my poor helpless mother ; and I was proud to have the right to do everything for you, and make you a comfortable and happy home. I am afraid I thought very little of the responsibilities marriage brings with it. I am afraid I have thought very little of them since, until I got your letter, and found, all at once, that you had made me a lady. And if I should be unfit for it, Will—if I should make you ashamed of me—what shall I do then ? "

"Don't conjure up possible evils, my dear ; the world is quite full enough of them without that. But you will see, perhaps, the necessity that has arisen for our keeping our marriage a secret for a little while longer. Not a word to anybody, Jane. Remember, not to anybody."

"Not even to poor mother ? it would make her so happy," said the girl regretfully.

"Good heavens ! *No*. Your mother is the last person in the world to confide a secret to. Why, she would tell Sarah before half an hour was over her head ! "

"And *your* mother, Will ? "

"I shan't tell her either, not until we are settled at Lambcote Hall—if we ever are."

"Why do you say, 'if we ever are' ? " exclaimed Jane, with surprise.

"Only because 'there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip,' you know ; and who's to tell what may happen in a couple of months ? We may all be dead before Lady Ewell takes herself off to her father."

"Oh, Will ! it's your turn to talk nonsense now. But about mother, dear ; you won't separate us—will you ? You promised me you never would."

She looked wistfully at her husband as she spoke, but his eyes did not meet hers.

"If I said so, my dear, it must be all right. I have not been in the habit of breaking my promises to you—have I ? What time is it ? Let me see. By Jove ! five o'clock ; and

I've had no luncheon. I thought I was feeling deucedly hungry!"

She sprang to her feet immediately.

"How selfish of me, Will! Here have I been thinking of nothing but myself, whilst my boy was starving. What will you have, dear? There is a cold pie in the house, and some lamb chops, and a bunch of lovely asparagus."

"I'll have some cutlets and asparagus, Jane; and tell the girl to go round to the wine merchant's, and order in a dozen of the best claret. How soon will it be ready?"

"In half an hour, dear; but I must go and look after it myself. There is the *Times*. I sent for it to-day, thinking you would be home; and I will bring you up some hot water in half a minute."

She was on the threshold of the door, when he called her back.

"Jane, can't the servant do all this? Is there any absolute necessity for your running up and down stairs with hot water, and going into the kitchen to cook my cutlets?"

"Yes, dear, an absolute necessity. You would not be able to eat them unless I did." Then, seeing the annoyance on his countenance, she came back, and leaned over his chair, and pressed her lips to the crown of his head. "I like to do it, Will," she murmured. "I suppose I shall have to give up such things in the future, but let me do them whilst I may. I have been brought up to it, you know; and I love to wait on you, and run your messages and cook your dinner. I have done it for so long, and you have said I made you so comfortable and so happy. Don't strip me of all my pleasures in one day!"

"That's a funny thing for a person to say who has just been made a baronet's wife, with seven thousand a year!" he retorted, as he unfolded the paper.

"But I am not to be a baronet's wife till you go to Lambscote," she answered gaily. "You told me so. And when I get there, I will be very good, I promise you, and pretend I never darned a sock or cooked a cutlet in my life. But I must teach mother not to talk about it—mustn't I? for she is so proud of my housekeeping ability, she thinks everyone must be proud of it too. Poor mother!" continued Jane, with affectionate pity, as she left the room; "how she will enjoy herself at Lambscote!"

As a vision of Mrs. Warner, arrayed in every colour of the rainbow, and with her tongue going like a water-mill, doing the honours of his new residence with her daughter, passed through Sir Wilfrid's brain, he shuddered, and closed his eyes.

"No," he thought, "that *cannot* be. What I promised Jane when I married her, and believed that this cottage would be our home for life, must not be allowed to stand in the way of her own advancement. Her slender chance with the county families would be ruptured at once, unless her mother is kept in the background. We must get some one to live at the cottage and look after the old lady instead. How extraordinary it seems to remember what Parfitt declares—that after all this time of apparent security, Jane is actually *not* my wife! I wonder if she will be cut up when she hears it! But I shan't tell her, until I am prepared to repeat the ceremony. She is not, perhaps, in every particular what I would have chosen for Lady Ewell, but she is a very handsome, intelligent girl, and there is no doubt of her affection for me. And, hang it all! after a couple of years a man could scarcely be such a scoundrel as to propose to annul the marriage. It would be *too* mean! But I wish Parfitt hadn't put the notion in my head."

Which proved that, in whatever light his *conscience* might regard such a contingency, Sir Wilfrid's inclination meant to have a fight for it when the time arrived.



CHAPTER V

SURBITON.

THE new Baronet's mother, Mrs. Ewell, lived with her five daughters on three hundred a year, in a small cottage at Surbiton, where she had retreated on the death of her husband. She had found it a hard task since then to feed and clothe herself and her children like gentlewomen, and many a sigh had she directed even towards the pittance which her son received from the Government, thinking how much more comfortably they might all live together if Wilfrid would only join his income to hers. But Wilfrid had had his own reasons for continuing to live by himself.

When Mrs. Ewell, however, was apprised of her son's wonderful and unexpected good fortune, all her difficulties seemed to vanish. She made sure then that Sir Wilfrid would provide a home for herself and his sisters at Lambcote Hall, or failing that, would make such an addition to their income as to place them above want. And the girls, too. What views they entertained of balls and theatres, and new dresses and long visits to Somerset, and eligible young men that should lay their fortunes at their feet. Their years varied from five-and-twenty to fifteen, but not one of them had ever mixed in the gaiety usual to young people of their age. Neither before their father's death nor after it had there been the requisite money forthcoming for such pleasures, and the announcement that their only brother had suddenly been transformed into a wealthy baronet, gave them almost as much joyful anticipation as it had done to him.

Mrs. Ewell had written more than once begging him to run down to Surbiton and receive her congratulations in person, and when, on the morning following his return to Chelsea, he walked into her tiny sitting-room, he was almost overwhelmed by the family greeting. His sisters hung about his neck like leeches, as they poured upon him a volley of kisses and questions, which they gave him time neither to return nor answer. But his mother sat in her armchair, pale, silent, and

almost tearful at the prospect that she believed had opened before her.

What a fearful thing is poverty to the upper classes, whose creed is that they disgrace themselves if they do not live up to the position in which they were born. What days and nights of suspense they undergo as the time comes round for paying rent, and taxes, and quarterly bills! What sacrifices they make of food and warmth and comfort, in order that the bonnet they go to church in may be re-trimmed, or their best dress turned for the fourth time! What miserable apeing of people with ten times their money! What absurd notions about "proper pride!" What idiotic ones concerning false shame!

If Mrs. Ewell and her daughters had gone far away to some remote country place, they might have bred their own poultry and killed their own pigs, and lived in comfort and respectability on three hundred a year. No one would have been the worse for their going, and they would have been all the better. But their fear of what "people would say" forbade it. They had some crumbs still adhering of the halo that once shone upon them through the husband and father. The wife of the Bishop of the Tarantoo Islands continued to ask them to a refectory of bad sherry and stale sponge cake once a year; the Dean of Humbugdom bestowed his valuable patronage on the widow and orphans of his late curate by making them canvass for the admission of little deaf and dumb boys to a school which cost him nothing to support; and Surbiton society in general, that is, that part of it whose income did not exceed five hundred a year, looked on the Ewells as worthy of their acquaintance, and bored them accordingly.

It was hardly to be supposed that Mrs. Ewell would willingly exchange all these advantages for a sufficiency of food, warmth and clothing in a country village where she would be utterly unknown. She would have screamed with horror if anyone had suggested that Edith and Fanny should clean the rooms, or that Flora, Mary, and Rosie were quite capable of learning how to cook a dinner.

The wretched scullery-maid who was supposed to perform such duties for them might burn the meat, and serve up cinders with the potatoes for ever before any of Mrs Ewell's daughters should defile their hands with menial work. So, like many other foolish, short-sighted people, she had preferred

to exist in a Cockney suburb of London to living amongst the glories of a country life, and the delights of healthy occupation. Her days were passed in uselessness, her nights filled with anxious care, and half her time spent in lamentations over her inability to make ends meet. To such a woman the change in Wilfrid's prospects only meant a better appearance before the world, but it more than satisfied her.

When his sisters at last released him, and he turned to his mother, her emotion was so great she could only murmur "God bless you!"

He kissed her, and took the chair by her side.

"Yes," he said, answering the thought which he read in every countenance, "it has been rather a stroke of good luck, hasn't it? Fancy poor Bob going off in that unexpected way. He was only ill twelve hours. And the little boy, too! Poor Carrie feels it awfully, of course. So did I at first; but a man can't remain inconsolable for an event which has come as such a blessing to himself."

"A blessing, indeed," murmured Mrs. Ewell fervently; "and after the poverty we have suffered since your poor father's death, it seems too good to be true. How little I ever dreamt to live to see you the owner of Lambcote Hall! It's a beautiful place, Wilfrid, is it not? I have never been there since your late uncle's time, but I understand that Sir Robert greatly improved it."

"He rebuilt and decorated part of the Hall, but it is not in the power of man to improve its natural beauties. Don't you remember, mother, that it stands in a splendidly timbered park, enclosing a natural lake? The ornamental grounds are in perfection, and the stabling and hothouses are newly erected. I believe Bob got some money with his wife, which he laid out upon these improvements."

"Will you not have to make the widow some indemnification, Wilfred?"

"I think not," he answered carelessly, and without the apparent recognition of any moral obligation in the matter. "Parfitt has said nothing about it. And, hang it all, you know, she is living rent-free, and will do so for the next two months."

"Oh, shan't we see Lambcote for two whole months?" exclaimed Rosie.

Rosie was Sir Wilfrid's youngest and prettiest sister. She

was also his favourite, but he did not vouchsafe to answer her remark.

"One would have thought," he continued to his mother, "that when a man came into a place it was his at once. But it seems that the etiquette of the law demands a certain concession on his part, and Lady Ewell is to remain at Lambscote as long as it pleases her—that is, within a reasonable limit."

"Well, after all, my dear boy, some things are not to be done in a hurry. I know you will require my assistance in putting your house in order, and if I have to give up *this*," suggested Mrs. Ewell wistfully; "it will take some little time to arrange my affairs."

"Why should you think of giving up this?" he demanded. "Lambscote has been kept in too good order to require a twelvemonth's scrubbing."

"How many rooms are there at the Hall, Wilfrid?" asked his sister Edith.

"I am sure I don't know. More than you could count."

"And do you get the horses and carriages and everything?" said Flora.

"Yes; all the property that has been purchased with the income becomes personal to the estate. I believe there are ten or twelve horses in the stables. How I *will* hunt next season."

"And oh, Wilfrid, may I learn to ride?" cried Rosie.

"Yes, dear, that you shall. Mother must let you come and stay with me in the autumn, and I'll make a horsewoman of you."

"Not before the autumn?" pouted Fanny.

It was becoming patent to all of them that Lambscote Hall was not to be a freehold property for the whole family, and Mrs. Ewell developed a certain snappishness under the discovery.

"Don't worry your brother, Fanny," she interposed. "The Hall is his own, and he will do as he pleases with it. Though I think you will find, Wilfrid, that you cannot get on so well without ladies as you seem to imagine. No house can be properly managed without a woman at the head of it. You cannot invite a lady to stay with you unless there is some one of her own sex to do the honours of the establishment. It would hardly be proper for your sisters, even, to

stay at Lambscote unless they had a female *chaperon* to look after and control them."

"But who said I was going to try and get on without ladies?" he retorted, with a smile. "Don't be afraid, mother. Lambscote will have a mistress in good time."

At this announcement a chasm, of which Mrs. Ewell had not yet dreamed, opened at her feet. Of course she had expected that Sir Wilfrid would marry—some day—but he was only twenty-two, and she had hoped that the evil was quite in the distance. The calm certainty with which he mentioned the prospect made her gasp.

"But not *yet*, my dear, I *hope*," she ejaculated. "What you allude to cannot take place for several years to come. Why, you were only twenty-two last birthday."

"I know that, mother."

"It would be *impossible* for you to marry under thirty."

"Do you think so?"

"I mean it would be very unadvisable. Marriage is a serious undertaking, Wilfrid. Once done, it is not to be undone, and the consequences abide by you, for weal or woe, to your life's end."

"So I have heard," he answered, yawning slightly behind his hand.

"Mamma, I am sure that Wilfrid is already in love," exclaimed Edith. "He looks dreadfully conscious. And now he is blushing—actually blushing! Oh, Wilfrid, is it true?"

"What is true? That I am in love? No, decidedly not. Will that content you?"

"And I trust you will not even *think* of marriage for many years to come," said Mrs. Ewell.

"I can't promise you that, mother. Lambscote requires a mistress, as you said just now, and I do not think it will be long before you see one established there."

"Of course, now that you are rich, you will be surrounded by harpies, all eager to win you, or rather, your money," said his mother, quite unconscious that she was a harpy herself, or wished to be, "and whatever you do, Wilfrid, be careful! Try to *raise* your family, my dear, not lower it, and look out for a woman with an independence of her own. I hope I should be the last person to approve of mercenary motives in marriage. But yet, you see, you have many claims upon you, Wilfrid, and seven thousand a year, though

it appears a large income, does not go very far with a place like Lambcote. And I feel sure, my dear boy, you would not let any wife make you entirely forget your poor dear sisters—your own father's children—who have never—never—never——” But here Mrs. Ewell's disappointment overcame her eloquence, and she relapsed into silence and tears. It was not unnatural that she should be disappointed, or that she should have expected her son to offer to share some of his newly-acquired wealth with her. Had his father been living she would have had it all, and he knew how she had to pinch and strive and save to keep up appearances. But his wealth had already somewhat hardened Sir Wilfrid's heart, and he did not like the idea of sharing it with anyone. He was annoyed by his mother's address, and still more by her tears, and he showed his annoyance freely.

“I don't see why the deuce you should talk to me as if I ran any risk of forgetting my sisters,” he answered testily. “I have never been in a position to help them yet. How on earth could I have done it on a hundred a fifty a year? I could hardly keep my own body and soul together. But if you mean, mother, that I ought not to marry on their account, I can't agree with you. They will always have the run of their teeth at Lambcote, I suppose, as long as they want it; and I should think the kindest thing I could do for them would be to marry, and then they can stay with my wife, and meet lots of men, and get married themselves. And for the rest—— Now, girls, what can I do for you in the present? What is it you want most—new gowns, or hats, or what? Name the article, and the amount, and I'll send you down a cheque to-morrow morning.”

“Oh, Wilfrid! how good of you! Mamma, what *shall* we ask him for? We do want such lots of things,” said Fanny.

“You do, indeed, my poor children—lots of things. But since your brother wishes you to choose, you had better ask him for new dresses,” sighed Mrs. Ewell.

“Yes—yes! Dresses—ball dresses!” cried the girls simultaneously.

“*Ball dresses*, my dears!” exclaimed their mother. “How can you ever go to balls?”

“There'll be balls at Lambcote,” said Rosie, perched on her brother's knee. “You'll give some on purpose for us—won't you, Wilfrid?”

"Perhaps so, Rosie; but you had better not buy the dresses so long beforehand. Any way, I will send you the money to-morrow to do what you like with."

"You dear good brother!" "Oh! you *are* a darling!" and, "I shall have black and crimson, because it goes with everything," came from various quarters of the room, as the girls huddled together to discuss the momentous questions of colour, material and make.

"And the young lady who is to be the future Lady Ewell, I presume you have already fixed on her, Wilfrid?" said his mother, under cover of the tumult.

He coloured at the accusation.

"Have I said anything to make you think so? You forget how few opportunities I have had hitherto for choice."

"It will not take long when you are once launched in Society. But don't neglect my advice, Wilfrid. If you *must* marry, marry well. Your fortune and position as a baronet entitle you to a well-born, if not a wealthy wife. Indeed, I am not sure if birth is not of greater consequence to you now than money. If you make some 'nobody' into Lady Ewell, she will be a source of constant mortification to you; but an aristocratic connection will raise, not only yourself, but your children."

"Will they need raising?"

"No one is above it, Wilfrid. The envious will not let the world easily forget that you were only a clerk in Somerset House. Don't give them the chance to pick out a flaw in the antecedents of your wife."

"I will do my best to prevent it," he answered moodily.

They were almost the same words, and certainly the same sentiments, which the lawyer had used to him the day before; and though Sir Wilfrid had not yet thought it possible to rectify the error he had made, he was beginning to think that it *was* a very serious error, and one he would be well rid of.

"Do you know Lena St. Blase, Wilfrid?" asked his mother, presently, rousing him from a reverie.

"Yes, slightly—that is, I met her with her mother, Lady Otto, at Lambscote two years ago."

"Now, that is the sort of wife I should like you to have," continued Mrs. Ewell; "well-born, beautiful, and with a little fortune of her own. I think it is five hundred a year."

"Five hundred a year!" echoed the new baronet contemptuously. "Not enough to keep her in dresses."

"Oh, my dear boy, your ideas are growing too extravagant! But, any way, Miss St. Blase's fortune would evade the necessity of any great expenditure on your part in settlements. And she is the grand-daughter of the Duke of Martyrdom, you know; and her mother comes of an unexceptionable family."

"What is all that to me?"

"Because you mentioned the Westerleys had asked you to dinner, and I think the St. Blases are staying there. And if it should be the case, it will be a grand opportunity, Wilfrid."

"But not one of which I shall avail myself. I don't like Miss St. Blase, mother. She snubbed me uncommonly at Lambcote; and I thought her very stuck-up, rude, and disagreeable."

"She will not snub you *now*, my dear."

"That is no compliment to myself."

"But you were such a boy two years ago."

"I was old enough to—to—admire her; and every man's admiration, if respectfully offered, is worthy of respect."

He did not consider it expedient to tell his mother that he had done more than admire Lena St. Blase. But the fact was that he had met her before his marriage with Jane Warner, and she had raised one of those wild, mad passions in his breast, which most boys feel at some time or other for women older than themselves.

Lena St. Blase was a beautiful, heartless flirt of five-and-twenty. She cared for nobody in the world—not even her mother; but she was inordinately proud of her birth and station, and vain to excess of her own person. She had coquetted and played with the young Government clerk, as such women will, until she had quite turned his brain; and then, when he could keep silence no longer, and his passion burst forth in words, she had struck him dumb with her look of cold astonishment at his temerity. She had wounded his pride so bitterly, that he had rushed away from Lambcote to the shelter of Wolsey Cottage, to be made much of and assiduously waited on by Jane Warner.

It was from that very episode in his life that this marriage had originated. When we are most cruelly hurt in the

battle of life, we are most anxious to forget it—even to the cutting of our throat, or the spoiling of the remainder of our existence.

Sir Wilfrid had fancied he loved Jane Warner before that visit to Lambcote Hall; and after it, he persuaded himself that he *did* love her, and the other had been but an unholy dream.

And so perhaps it was. It was certainly a very different sentiment from any he had ever felt for his wife. It made him shrink from the remembrance of Lena St. Blase as we shrink from recalling some horrible fraud or act of treachery in which we have been worsted. But he could not tell his mother all that. So he only said—what was not true—that he considered her rude and disagreeable, and Mrs. Ewell took umbrage at the words.

When Sir Wilfrid said he was old enough to admire Miss St. Blase, she answered :

"*Everyone* must admire her—old or young! Lady Otto was a schoolfellow of mine, and in your father's lifetime we saw a great deal of each other. I know that she has brought up her daughter most admirably. I met them at a charitable bazaar in Westminster last month (the Dean was good enough to send us two tickets of admittance), and Lena was looking positively lovely—and asked after you with the greatest kindness."

Sir Wilfrid's heart gave a guilty throb as he received the information.

"And she is staying, you say, with the Westerleys?"

"Lady Otto told me they would be there about this time. General Westerley is a cousin of hers, I believe, and guardian to Miss St. Blase. I hope you *will* meet them, Wilfrid. I should like you to be friends."

"It is quite a matter of indifference to me," he answered, and then he rose, and said it was time he was getting back to town and looking after Parfitt, and his chambers.

Mrs. Ewell dismissed him with a sigh. She was terribly disappointed by the unfruitful issue of his visit. But the girls, less easily depressed, hung about him to the last, vehemently thanking him for the promised dresses, and Rosie accompanied him to the door. Of all his sisters, she was the one who resembled him most both in appearance and disposition, and although the youngest, the one he most con-

fided in and liked for his companion. Indeed, Sir Wilfrid's heart held no stronger or steadier affection than what he entertained for his sister Rosie.

"Mamma has said something to vex you; I am sure of it," she whispered, as she held his hand. "But never mind, dear Wilfrid. She feels *cranky*, you know, because you have the money instead of her; but she'll be all right when she's got used to it."

"It's rather hard lines on a man, though to be '*down*' on him for no fault of his own. I can't help my father dying—nor Bob either. And the money would not benefit my mother more by passing out of the family. I think it's beastly selfish of her."

"Never mind, darling," reiterated Rosie, coaxingly; "you know *I* love you, and all I want is to see you quite, *quite* happy in your own way."

"I don't think I should ever be *quite* happy without you, Rosie, whatever happened. Say—will you come and live with me at Lambcote for good and all?"

The child—she was not much more—reddened with delight.

"Oh, Wilfrid! it is *too* lovely even to think of! But would your wife like it?"

His brows contracted.

"*My wife!* What do you mean?"

"Why, mamma says you are sure to marry some day, Wilfrid, and then your wife might turn me out of the Hall and send me back to this horrible Surbiton."

"Not she!" he laughed. "My wife must do as *I* like, Rosie, or do nothing at all."

"Oh, you Bluebeard! Then I may really dream of it?"

"Do more than dream, child! Get ready. I will write to my mother about it as soon as my plans are settled.—Rosie," he added gravely, "I am not sure if my own life will be a success; but I'll make yours one if I can. I should like to think in after years when you are happily married, that you could say you owed it all to me. For I love you, dear—more, perhaps, than anything else in this world."

He kissed her on the forehead and walked away, and as Rosie gazed after his retreating figure, she could not help wondering why, when all this good fortune had just come to him, he should be so low-spirited as to fancy his life would not be a success.

CHAPTER VI.

LENA.

THE chambers in the Adelphi proved to be all that Sir Wilfrid could possibly desire. They had just been vacated by a fashionable young diplomat ordered off on foreign service, and furnished according to his fancy. There was nothing for the Baronet to do but to sign the agreement and take possession. He had no sooner seen the rooms than he decided to engage them, and authorised Mr. Parfitt to secure for him also the services of the valet and cook who had been in the employment of their late owner. Meanwhile he repaired to an hotel to keep sundry appointments with tailors and bootmakers, and to answer his voluminous correspondence.

It is wonderful how one's letters increase with one's income. Very few people had troubled themselves to write to the Somerset House clerk, unless it were to dun him for their money; but now, he had correspondents of every grade and rank, from the begging-letter of a curate at the East-end of London, to the perfumed *billet* of a countess, inviting him to her *soirée dansante*.

But the only one that Sir Wilfrid was puzzled how to answer was the invitation to dinner from the Westerleys. He had fully intended to accept it, as he liked both the general and his wife; but his mother's suggestion had made him undecided—he did not feel as if he could meet Lena St. Blase again. He recalled their parting at Lambscote Hall, when she had addressed him in words of such withering scorn and insult, that they rang in his ears even to that day, and made his cheeks burn only to remember.

Would she make her contempt patent to the world, and let all General Westerley's visitors know how presumptuous and foolish he had been ever to suppose that she would stoop to become his wife on one hundred and fifty a year? But at this juncture, Sir Wilfrid's feelings were diverted by the remembrance that he was no longer a poor clerk, but a wealthy baronet, and he determined to accept the invitation.

Yes! He would let Miss St. Blase see that after all he had not proved so contemptible a match, and that it was *his* turn now to be proud and indifferent and cold. He would meet her as though they had never met before, and be so studiously courteous and amiable as to convince her that the little episode at Lambscote was entirely forgotten, or drifted so far into the past as to have degenerated into something to be laughed over. He was not sure that, given an opportunity, he should not allude to it, and thank her jestingly for having cured him of so foolish a dream. Acting upon which idea, Sir Wilfrid accepted the Westerleys' invitation, and immediately fell to thinking what he should wear, and how make himself look most fascinating on the auspicious occasion. Let no one imagine from this that he was more conceited than the generality of his sex. They are all, in their way, as vain as women, and would feel the want of their mirrors quite as much as their sisters, or their wives.

When Sir Wilfrid Ewell looked in his, on the evening of the dinner-party, he smiled with satisfaction. And so far as his appearance went, he had every reason to be satisfied. The tailor, and hosier, and bootmaker, had done their utmost to turn him out a fashionable gentleman, and the only ornament he wore, a diamond solitaire, which blazed in his shirt-front, was the perfection of taste. He had improved too, personally, since he had parted with Lena St. Blase. Two years had added manliness to a set of rather effeminate features, and covered the short upper lip with a moustache. Indeed, as he first entered the drawing-room of the Westerleys' house, the young woman who had scorned his boyish passion hardly knew him again.

"*That* young Ewell?" she whispered to her mother, as the baronet was announced. "Why, how good-looking he has grown!"

Lady Otto and her daughter had had more than one conversation on the subject of Sir Robert's successor since they had heard the news. General Westerley had extolled Sir Wilfrid to the skies, and openly advised his niece to catch him if she could. And Lady Otto had backed up the opinion of her cousin. Of course it was perfectly right of dear Lena to have refused Mr. Ewell at Lambscote. She could not have married him then. The thing was impossible—too

absurd even to think of. But *now* circumstances were altered. Sir Wilfrid Ewell was in a position to maintain her as she had a right to expect, and dear Lena must not forget she was twenty-five last birthday.

"Why on earth did you bring me into the world so soon then?" remonstrated the daughter, shrugging her shoulders.

"No one blames you, my love. Of course it is not your fault, still, eligibles are becoming scarcer every year, and I really think this is a chance you have no right to throw away."

"But remember how you made me snub him at Lambcote, mamma! Do you suppose he has forgotten it already? Why, I called him every name I could think of."

"You can make him forget it if you choose. You know the boy was awfully in love with you, and you are (if anything) handsomer than you were then. You really must try. I will give nothing for your chance of marriage if you go through another season. And you are not the sort of woman, my dear, who will be happy in a single life."

Miss St. Blase made a gesture of contempt for the honourable condition alluded to, but all she said was:

"Poor dear Jack!"

The name seemed to rouse Lady Otto's anger.

"Lena!" she exclaimed authoritatively, "I have told you already that I refuse to hear that man mentioned. You ought to be ashamed of yourself! A rattlebrained, extravagant scapegrace, who lives on his wits, or his friends, and has had his name associated with everything that is most disgraceful! Captain Dorsay is unfit to be the acquaintance of a decent woman, far less the intimate friend you would make of him. I have forbidden him my house, and I have forbidden you to speak of him before me. Why will you be so disobedient?"

"He's awfully handsome!" sighed her daughter, "and he's awfully nice."

"I don't care what you may think of him. I *know* Captain Dorsay to be a disreputable character, and I decline to discuss him altogether."

"You're very hard, mamma, where you take a dislike."

"I am careful of you, Lena. I am obliged to be, since you will take no care of yourself. But with regard to Sir Wilfrid Ewell, you will receive him kindly, will you not? The

General says he is considered quite one of the best *partis* of the season."

"I will be as amiable as I can, but I do not think he is likely to give me the opportunity. He told me when we parted that he should curse my name to the last day of his life."

"Rubbish! Men say anything when they're in a rage. You have only to look unhappy and repentant to bring him to your feet again—that is, if he is still free."

"Well, I'll try, for I certainly have a penchant for Lambcote. I always thought it a charming place. And how much a year has he, mamma?"

"The General says seven thousand clear, and from the style poor dear Sir Robert lived in, I shouldn't wonder if it were more. Sir Wilfrid is coming to dinner on Thursday, I understand. You must wear black, Lena. You never look better than in a black dress. So tell Louise to put the new trimming on your black satin, and do your best, there's a good girl."

"Very well, mamma, I will," replied her daughter, who saw the advantages of a reconciliation with her cast-off lover just as well as anybody else.

This conversation had taken place a few days before the dinner. Ladies will talk in this open way sometimes before each other, and call a spade a spade, without any nonsense about it. And Lena was used to plain speaking from her mother, and would not have understood any other language.

It was observable on the evening of the dinner-party, how very pale she was. Mrs. Westerley, who was a plain, honest sort of woman, not half aware of the many artificial means employed by fashionable ladies to obtain their own way, was quite concerned to see dear Lena look so ill. She was certain she must have a dreadful headache. And it was not until Lady Otto had taken her cousin's wife aside, and whispered to her not to notice her poor child's looks, as she felt very nervous and agitated at the idea of meeting Sir Wilfrid Ewell again, that Mrs. Westerley's thoughts turned in another direction, and she became all curiosity to learn *why* Sir Wilfrid's advent should affect the daughter of Lady Otto St. Blase.

"Ah! naturally you have not heard; such things are best kept to one's self," sighed the mother; "but Lena and Sir

Wilfrid wanted to marry each other years ago, and I was obliged to forbid the continuance of the intimacy. How *could* they have married, dear Mrs. Westerley, on one hundred and fifty pounds a year? It was not to be thought of. But though my dear child was sweetly obedient to my wishes, she felt it terribly, and, I may say, it is the only reason she is unmarried at the present moment."

"But it is sure to come right now," interposed the General's wife good-naturedly, "for Sir Wilfrid is in a position to marry anyone."

"Yes, if he is not already engaged to some one else," replied Lady Otto. "But two years is a long time at their age, and perhaps he has forgotten all about her. So pray say nothing on the subject to anybody, and take no more notice of my poor Lena's looks."

"I will not, my dear. You may depend on my discretion. But I shall just run down to the dining-room and alter the cards, and send the young people into dinner together. Then they will have an opportunity to make it up again," said Mrs. Westerley. And this was just what Lady Otto was angling for, so she made no opposition to the idea.

Lena was in effect looking really ill and pale. Her mother had said to her before dressing :

"Whatever you do, dear, look fragile and interesting. Let him think you have been fretting. There is nothing touches a man more than to imagine that a woman has been pining after him. And as to the language you used towards him, should the subject crop up, lay all the blame on me. Say I dictated to you. Men always hate their mothers-in-law, so a grudge more or less against me on Sir Wilfrid's part will probably make no difference in our future intercourse. Think only of yourself, my dear, and the best means of securing him. I am so anxious to see you well and happily settled."

Miss St. Blase had seen the sense of her mother's advice, and followed it to the letter.

She had overlaid her pretty features with *perle de blanc*, and carefully eradicated every tinge of colour from her naturally fair complexion. When she was ready to go downstairs, she looked like a marble statue in modern dress. Everyone called Lena St. Blase beautiful, and yet, strictly speaking, she was not so beautiful as she was attractive, especially to

the other sex. Her golden hair, originally a pale brown, but transformed under the magic influence of aureoline to the tinge of a silkworm's cocoon, was piled upon her head in a fluffy and negligent fashion, that looked as if no art had been employed in its arrangement. Her hazel eyes, which were not large, were set too near together to be honest or amiable, but Miss St. Blase was clever enough to make them express any feeling she chose to pretend that she underwent. Her nose, sharp and pointed, and her small mouth and teeth, were the best features she possessed, but she could boast of a skin of almost unprecedented fairness, and a neck and arms that riveted the attention of all that looked at them. For much as poets and painters have raved about the beauties of curve and tint and texture in the female breast and throat and arm, they have naturally sung of but *one* woman and painted but one form, the ideal of their dreams.

The generality of women have neither necks nor arms fit to be exposed for general inspection, which may be proved any day by the dreadful exhibitions afforded us, gratis, at theatres and balls.

How the owners of scraggy necks and withered bosoms, of reddish-purple arms, rough skins, and bony elbows, can possibly imagine that they make a pleasing picture for the public, is a mystery. And yet, from the complacency with which they uncover and exhibit them, they must think so. But Lena St. Blase had nothing to fear on this account. Her figure was a miracle of perfection, and her little dimpled hands and feet were models. Indeed, nature, in manufacturing this young woman, had forgotten nothing that was absolutely necessary to womankind, except a heart, and that article was conspicuous only by its absence. She was the most heartless and cold-blooded creature it is possible to conceive. She could laugh over the comical bounds and twists of a run-over dog, or put an animal to death with her own hands without a shudder.

But she had not many opportunities in civilized life of displaying the cruelty of her disposition in so coarse a manner. It showed itself more by her utter want of sympathy with those in pain or trouble, and by the coolness with which she would wound the feelings of her friends by her candid remarks on their personal appearance or private possessions. Animals were afraid of Lena St. Blase, and generally snarled

or slunk away if she went near them; and little children never dared to do more than 'gaze up at her wistfully from behind the shelter of their mothers' skirts.

But she disliked both children and animals, and said so openly; and her servants stood almost as much in awe of her as these smaller intelligences. Even Lady Otto dreaded a discussion with her daughter, which generally ended in her own discomfiture, and made her long for the time when she should be freed of her daily presence. It is no wonder she was ready to encourage the suit of Sir Wilfrid Ewell, or any other man—except, indeed, that disreputable Captain Dorsay, who (if he had married Lena) would only have returned her on her mother's hands, a burden for life, twelve months afterwards.

When Sir Wilfrid entered the Westerleys' drawing-room that evening, his head, notwithstanding his determination to be brave and cool, was spinning like a humming-top, and he very nearly shook hands with a lady he had never seen before in mistake for Mrs. Westerley.

The white marble statue in a black satin dress was watching his every movement from her vantage ground in the corner, and decided at once that Sir Wilfrid's agitation was on her own account.

"He has heard I am here," she thought, "and it has upset him. All right! The game is mine. I have only to go in and win."

Meanwhile General Westerley was audibly congratulating his guest.

"So glad for *your* sake, my dear fellow, and if poor Sir Robert *was* to go, you know, why, the estate couldn't have fallen into better hands. You must let me have a peep at Lambscote when you have taken possession. By the way, I think you must have met my cousin, Lady Otto St. Blase and her daughter there. They were very intimate with the Ewells. They are here to-night. Lady Otto, I believe you know, Sir Wilfrid Ewell. You must congratulate him on his new dignities. And my cousin, Miss St. Blase! I suppose I need not introduce you."

And then the General turned to greet a later arrival, and Sir Wilfrid found himself in the presence of his broken idol.

CHAPTER VII

HEALED.

SIR WILFRID had made up his mind to be very haughty and cold when he met Lena St. Blase, and so, for the first ten minutes, he was. He stood before her, bowing as formally as though they had never met before, and Miss St. Blase, whose *rôle* it was to appear timid and nervous, and ill at ease, flashed one startled look at him, and then turned her head aside, and bowed as formally as himself.

Lady Otto, however, did not let him off so easily. She held out her hand with so pleading an expression that he was compelled to take it.

"Forgive me, Sir Wilfrid," she said plaintively, "but meeting with you recalls all our dear lost friend's kindness so palpably to my mind. What charming days those used to be at Lambscote Hall! How hospitable and generous they both were. But since it was the will of Providence that he should go, let me congratulate Lambscote on its successor. I feel sure the dear old place will lose nothing by passing into your hands."

"I am obliged to you," replied Sir Wilfrid gravely.

"My poor girl," murmured Lady Otto, moving a little to one side, "don't notice the change in her looks, Sir Wilfrid. She is so sensitive on the score of her appearance."

"Has Miss St. Blase been ill, then?"

"She has no positive illness, but she has never been really well for some time past. The doctors are quite puzzled about her. I am afraid I was rather hard on my poor child at one time. But a mother's heart is so anxious, Sir Wilfrid, she is apt occasionally to err on the wrong side."

Sir Wilfrid had no idea to what Lady Otto was alluding, but he answered:

"No doubt."

"But I have asked you nothing about yourself," continued Lady Otto playfully; though I suppose many changes have taken place with you since we parted. I know you are not

married yet, for I met your dear mother at a bazaar last month, and she told me so. But doubtless you are engaged?"

Sir Wilfrid shook his head.

"Fancy! Well, you soon will be, anyway, I, for one, am longing to hear there is a mistress at the Hall, so that we may have some more of those delightful gatherings there which we enjoyed so much in poor dear Sir Robert's time."

At this moment dinner was announced, and an old gentleman offered his arm to Lady Otto, and bore her away smiling to the dining-room. Sir Wilfrid stood where she had left him, wondering to whom he was allotted.

"Will you take in Miss St. Blase?" whispered his hostess presently.

He started and turned pale. For a moment his courage forsook him. It was bad enough to have been talking to her mother. It seemed almost impossible to place himself in such close proximity to the woman who had so recklessly wounded his feelings. But his pride came to his rescue and made him determine she should not guess that the hurt was still unhealed. He offered her his arm with apparent indifference, though the coat-sleeve shook on which she placed her hand.

As for Lena St. Blase, she seemingly dragged herself from the sofa with such difficulty, and leant so weakly on him during their transit to the dining-room, that Sir Wilfrid found himself almost compelled to notice the condition she assumed to be in.

"I am sorry to see you are not well," he remarked, as they seated themselves at table; "but the heat has been very trying this season. I hear complaints of it from every side."

Lena smiled faintly.

"Oh yes! Many people dislike it, but that is not the case with me. I am never better than in the summer weather."

"It does not appear to have done you much good this year," he answered, as he ventured to steal a look at her marble countenance.

"Do I look so frightful, then?" she said, with an affected laugh. "But I can assure you it has nothing whatever to do with the heat."

"You have been dissipating, then. Young ladies are apt to look fagged at the end of the season."

"Do you call June the 'end of the season?' But dissipation has nothing to answer for with regard to me. I have lost my taste for it."

"You *must* be ill, then," said Sir Wilfrid, with unconscious sarcasm.

"I have not been well for years past," replied Lena, gazing into her plate; "but there is nothing the matter with me physically."

"You look very pale," said her companion.

"I suppose the mind reflects itself upon the body," said Lena, rubbing her cheeks with her pocket-handkerchief (she knew well that *perle de blanc* is a safe mixture), "for there is no other cause for my looking pale. But pray let us talk of something more interesting than my looks. When are you going down to that dear, delightful place, Lambscote?"

"When Lady Ewell is ready to go to her father, General Ridley. But the Ridleys are abroad just now, and will not be back till September. It is a nuisance, but I could not dream of disturbing the poor thing before she has a home to go to."

"How good of you! And in September, then, you will actually be master there. How wonderful it seems."

"Very wonderful! We little thought of it two years ago, Miss St. Blase, did we?"

Lena put her hand to her side with a sudden gesture of pain.

"*Don't*, Sir Wilfrid—please *don't* allude to that time again. It is past and done with, you know. I have been a weak, foolish girl in my day, and often permitted myself to be led by others, whom I believed to be wiser than myself. But there are some things—I don't quite know how to explain myself—but—but—don't speak of it, at least, not now. I am hardly strong enough to bear any agitation."

"You are right," he answered. "It is best *not* spoken of, since it can never be remedied."

Lena looked down and bit her lip, as if to control any display of feeling, and they both remained silent for several minutes. But when two minds are occupied by one topic, it *will* crop up again, do what they may.

"So you admire Lambscote?" he said presently.

"Oh, immensely! Who would not? Those divine trees, and the rose-garden, and the park! They are like a dream!

Besides, I love the country! Some little while ago I tried hard to make mamma take me right away to some secluded place, where we should never hear the name of Society again, and where I might dream my life away beside a murmuring brook, or beneath the shadow of some leafy tree. But she loves this life too well to give it up altogether, as I would."

"But what has made you take such a distaste for Society, Miss St. Blase? You used to be devoted to it."

"Was I? That was because I had known no higher pleasure, perhaps. But I have suffered sufficient during the last two years to make me hate the very name of it."

"I am sorry to hear that. I should have thought that if anyone were ignorant of the taste of suffering, it must be you."

"Why?"

"Because," said Sir Wilfrid, growing red, "you inflict it so mercilessly upon others!"

"It is like a man," she retorted, "to believe it impossible for a woman to feel twice as much as she inflicts."

"Certainly, when the infliction comes from a free agent."

"Oh, Sir Wilfrid! I am not free, and I never was! Believe anything but that. In your circumstances it would be impossible for you to understand, perhaps, how entirely an only child and only daughter is under the control and influence of her mother. I don't want to cast blame on anyone but myself, for being so easily led," she went on hurriedly; "but don't imagine that I have not suffered as much as—as anybody else."

They have touched on the forbidden subject again, and the second time it has come easier than the first. How familiar it already seemed to Sir Wilfrid to be sitting next her, as in the old days at Lambscote, inhaling the faint perfume from her hair and her laces, and watching the play of her exquisitely moulded hands, as they dallied with her knife and fork. He felt something of the old feeling creeping over him, too, as his eyes kept wandering round to fix themselves in admiration on his beautiful companion. If she had not so insulted him in those by-gone days, how happy they might have been now, in the prospect that lay before them. But it was too late. Jane was the lawful mistress of Lambscote Hall, and Lena St. Blase could only enter its walls as a guest, where she should have reigned in undisputed right. He was

roused from the reverie into which these thoughts had plunged him by Miss St. Blase asking where he lived.

"I beg your pardon. Where do I live? In the Adelphi I have chambers there."

"How very convenient. Mamma and I are going back to Brompton next week. We live in Onslow Gardens. Have you any friends down there? Are you likely to be passing our way?"

"I do not know, I am sure," he stammered. "I have no friends at Brompton."

"Except ourselves, and I hope you have not *quite* ceased to regard us as friends. Oh, Sir Wilfrid! I have been longing to meet you, and ask you to be friends again, and lift a little of this burden off my heart. You do not know—I cannot tell you—*how* sorry I am for—for what happened at Lambscote."

"Pray don't allude to it in that regretful tone of voice," he answered. "It is, as you said before, all past and gone, and—and—almost forgotten. Let us agree to renew our acquaintance on quite a different footing."

"Then you will not let it stand in the way of our friendship! You will come and see mamma and me in Onslow Gardens?"

"Certainly I will, since you are kind enough to wish it."

Her evident anxiety on the subject was very soothing to his wounded vanity. Already were the cutting words—the contemptuous looks—the bitter sarcasm of the past fading into oblivion; whilst his mind became once more occupied by the grace and beauty of Lena St. Blase.

By the time dinner was concluded, he had become quite easy and cheerful in his converse with her, and as soon as the ladies found themselves in the drawing-room, Miss St. Blase rushed to her mother's side.

"It is all right," she whispered, "we have made friends again, and he is coming to see us in Onslow Gardens."

"I *told* you, my dear, you had but to try to succeed. Men are such fools—a few soft words will trap them as easily as treacle catches flies. You have but to flatter their vanity to bring them grovelling to your feet. Did you fix a day for him to visit us?"

"No; I left that for you."

"You did right! You must not seem too eager; I will arrange the rest before we part."

"Lay it on thick, mamma," said the daughter, laughing; "I was obliged to give you a terrible character, in order to get myself out of the scrape. You will have to use any amount of butter to clear yourself."

"Never mind," replied Lady Otto, "he shall be buttered in due time, but to-night would be too soon. It will be quite sufficient to book him for a dinner in Onslow Gardens."

And in effect, almost as soon as Sir Wilfrid entered the drawing-room, Lady Otto St. Blase sidled up to him (she was quite as good an actress in her way as her daughter), and entered into conversation.

"I *must* thank you, Sir Wilfrid, for having made friends with my Lena. It will be such an enormous weight off the poor child's mind. She has fretted more than enough over that unfortunate little affair at Lambscote. But if anyone is to be blamed for it, it is myself. And it is so noble—so good of you to promise it shall make no difference in our future intercourse."

"You make a great deal more of my concession than it is worth, Lady Otto! You seem to forget what a great pleasure it is to me, to feel myself once more on visiting terms with you and Miss St. Blase."

"I hope, indeed, it may prove an equal pleasure to all of us—and when will you come to us for a little Sunday dinner of eight—quite *en famille*, you know? Will the Sunday after next, the fifth of July, suit you?"

"I have no other engagement," said Sir Wilfrid, bowing.

"Then I may consider it settled, and will send you a card. What is your present address?"

"Fourteen, Rochester Street, Adelphi."

"I will make a note of it. And let me once more say how delighted I am at this fortunate meeting and its consequences."

The remainder of the evening passed in similar courtesies; and when Sir Wilfrid took his leave, it was with a heart flattered by the unexpected attentions he had received, and a head almost as much filled with the image of the lovely Lena St. Blase as when, in the old days, he had presumed to woo his goddess to come down from her pedestal and mate with a son of man.

CHAPTER VIII.

STRUCK.

MEANWHILE Jane, left alone in the old cottage at Chelsea, was happy as a bird. No prophetic vision of coming sorrow clouded her quiet existence. She missed Wilfrid terribly, and felt quite lost now that he no longer needed her daily attention and care ; but her head was filled with the grand prospect before her, and she had no time to think of anything else. The only thing that worried her was being obliged to keep it a secret. It was such good news, she was bursting to tell it to somebody. But her common-sense came to her aid, and she was silent as the grave, and went about her work as steadily as ever, looking forward anxiously to the moment when Wilfrid should be with her again, and the honours she had acquired made patent to the world. But she could not help amusing herself sometimes by exciting the curiosity of her feeble-minded mother with the questions she put to her, and the delight she evinced at her answers.

"Don't you think this cottage is getting very old and shaky, mother?" she would say, smiling, as they sat at their tea; "and is it not very small and inconvenient? I should like to have a much larger sitting-room than this. Would not you?"

Mrs. Warner looked quite frightened at the proposition.

"Larger, my dear Jane, larger! But what would your dear father think of that? And how could we make it larger? I am not a bricklayer, nor a carpenter you know. Though when I was a girl, I remember, just before your dear father proposed to me—the honeysuckle was out at that time."

"Yes, yes, dear! I remember it also. But I meant, how would you like to live in a larger house than this—*much* larger—a beautiful house, right away in the country, with woods and fields and gardens all round it? Wouldn't it be nice?"

"Is your father living there, Jane?"

"No, mother, I don't think he is."

"Then I certainly should not dream of moving until he came back from sea, and I wonder at your asking me," replied the old lady with infinite propriety. "Why, your father might come back to find us gone, and perhaps go wandering over the world to the last day of his life, and never discover our address. It is most inconsiderate of you to propose it, Jane, and not what I expected of you."

"Oh, mother!" exclaimed the girl, half-crying, half-laughing, "you mistake me altogether. I don't want you to leave Chelsea against your will. I only asked you if it would not be nice."

"No, my dear, not at all nice; and I will never countenance such a thing. Here I remain (whatever happens) until your deaf father comes back to me again."

And then Jane, not to be balked of the delight of giving her anticipation words, would try another tack.

"But if father were there before us, mother?—supposing he wrote and said he had prepared a lovely house for you and me—grander than anything we had ever known before—with carriages and horses to take us about, and servants to wait on us, and beautiful gardens and grounds for us to walk in, and never to know the want of money more? Wouldn't you like it then, dear? Wouldn't you go with your daughter, and live with her always, happy and peaceful in that lovely home?"

"If your father were there, Jane, certainly," cried the faithful heart.

"Poor dear old mother!" exclaimed the girl, as she knelt down by her side and drew Mrs. Warner's head upon her bosom. "Dear, faithful mother! How glad I should be to feel that, whatever happened, *you* would never know want or anxiety again! That you might roam safely about the country paths and lanes, indulging your innocent fancies to the uttermost, and waiting contentedly for the meeting which will never happen in this world. Oh, if nothing else made me grateful for the prospect before me, it would be the thought that your poor harmless life would be secured from further ill. Poor, poor mother!"

"I don't know why you should call me *poor*, Jane," replied Mrs. Warner, withdrawing herself from her daughter's embrace, and settling her cap. "Most women would call me very fortunate, as I feel I am. Why, Miss Prosser would

give her eyes to be as comfortably married, and to such a man, too. She said last night she quite agreed with me, that your father is the handsomest man in the world. And it is not every wife that can say that, Jane."

"Certainly not, dear," replied the girl, smiling.

"You will not be able to do so if you marry Mr. Cobble, or Fitch the baker."

"But I don't mean to marry Mr. Cobble, nor Fitch the baker, mother!" cried Jane, cheerfully.

"I don't know that, Jane," replied Mrs. Warner, with corresponding depression, "for Miss Prosser says, that now Mr. Ewell has left us, she does not know who else you *are* to marry."

"Miss Prosser is too fond of interfering in other people's affairs. Tell her to mind her own business, mother, and leave me to mind mine. I shall never marry at all, unless I can find some one to be very kind to my dear old mother. Rest assured of that."

"Indeed, Jane," said the old lady, drawing herself up with the utmost dignity, "I don't know that I require kindness at the hands of any gentleman, or that your father would approve of my accepting it. Your father is very particular, my dear. I remember once, when we were engaged to be married—it was summer-time, and the honeysuckle——"

"There is Will—Mr. Ewell, I mean," cried Jane suddenly, with a deep blush, as she jumped up and ran to the door.

It was a Saturday evening, and she had more than half expected him to pass the Sunday with her. During the past two or three weeks he had spent in his chambers he had been very particular in doing so, but the Saturday before he had been a defaulter, and his letters had not promised positively even for to-day. But here he was, and all Jane's fears were at an end. She met him, blooming like a rose with tender feeling and delight.

"Oh, Will!" she exclaimed beneath her breath, "I was so afraid you might not come, and I should have been so miserable if you had not. It seems a year since I saw you last."

"Well, here I am, you see," he answered, "and so your fears were groundless. But it was just touch and go that I got away. I had an engagement to dine at Richmond to-morrow, and I had no end of bother to get out of it."

"To dine at Richmond? Who with?"

"Oh, no one you know," he said awkwardly. "Some old friends of mine. How is your mother?"

"And you put them off in order to come home to me? How good of you, Will? And how is your business getting on? Will it soon be settled? Will you be able to—to—make things right as soon as you expected?" she asked in a whisper.

"I must have a talk with you about that by-and-by, my dear. In fact, I came over for that purpose."

"But you will stay to-morrow, Will?"

"Yes, I mean to; for Lady Ewell has asked me to run down to Lambscote next week, and I may be detained there. Ah! here's your mother. How are you, Mrs. Warner? Quite well?"

"Quite well, thank you, Mr. Ewell. And have you come back for good, sir? and will you occupy your old rooms? Jane, you had better go upstairs and see that Mr. Ewell's rooms are ready for him, whilst he rests in the parlour with me."

"They are quite ready, mother."

"Jane, you are too positive; it is a fault of yours. You had better do as your mother desires you, and leave me to entertain Mr. Ewell. Surely I am capable of doing so. Your dear father's rank in the navy—the Royal Navy, mind you, Mr. Ewell, not the merchant service—oh no! my dear husband is a lieutenant in the Royal Navy—and when he was courting me——"

"You had better do as your mother desires you, Jane," interposed Sir Wilfrid, "and I will take a cigar in the garden until you come to tell me that my rooms are ready."

So the one escaped to the garden, and the other to the first floor, leaving Mrs. Warner to finish her story to the empty tea-pot, and in a very few minutes Jane slipped quietly downstairs again, and joined her husband in the shrubbery path.

"Oh, Will, *kiss* me!" she exclaimed, as they found themselves alone and out of view; "for it seems an age since I have seen your face or heard your voice."

Sir Wilfrid took his cigar from his lips and did what she required of him, not coldly, but yet not eagerly. He was

not yet tired of Jane. Their intercourse had been too limited and broken in upon for that. Had she been his mistress, he would have persuaded himself that he still loved her very fondly. But as a wife he was beginning to regard her as a stumbling-block in his progress to the upper circles of Society—and the thought depressed him, if it did not cool his affection. He kissed her, but he sighed, and her instinct detected there was something wrong.

"What is the matter?" she asked him. "Are you ill?"

"Not at all. Do I look so?"

"No; but you sighed, and I do not like to hear you sigh when you are with me. Are your money matters going on favourably?"

"Perfectly so. How should they do otherwise? I have but to draw the interest of my money. By the way, that reminds me—I have brought you a cheque for twenty pounds to buy yourself some dresses with."

"Oh, Will dear, how good of you! Whatever shall I do with twenty pounds? Why, it is a little fortune!"

"Nonsense! You can have as much as ever you like—you have but to ask for it. I have more than we shall know how to spend."

"More than we shall know how to spend!" she repeated with a happy laugh. "Doesn't it seem like a fairy tale! And yet, Will, you can sigh!"

"Money is not a panacea for every ill in life, Janie, though it may seem so when one is not used to it. I have heard several things lately to make me sigh."

"What are they? Cannot you tell them to me? Cannot I give you any comfort or advice?"

"No, dear, I think not; I am afraid they are beyond your cure or mine. A sudden change like this, to wealth and position, brings so much responsibility with it. It seems as if the whole world were looking on to see what one will do or say."

"And this secrecy about our marriage makes it worse. I am sure it does," replied the girl. "When will it be over, Will? Surely it is time that people knew I am your wife? It places me in such a false position. How I wish now that everything had been fair and above-board from the first."

"So do I; but it is too late to say so, Jane. And you are

right, my dear, you *are* in a very false position. It is to speak of that to you that I made a point of coming home to-night."

"I am *so* glad," said Jane, never dreaming but that he meant the time for disclosure had arrived. "I have been longing for this moment, darling. I knew you would not keep me in suspense one day longer than was necessary."

"No, indeed. And when you have heard what I have to tell you, you will not be surprised that I have absented myself from Chelsea lately. You asked me why I sighed just now, Jane. I have some cause to sigh, dear."

"Not on my account, I hope, Will?"

"Partly—and partly on my own. You remember I told you I had confided the secret of our marriage to Mr. Parfitt?"

"To your solicitor? Yes."

"Well, he's been talking it over with me, and so forth, and he says that our marriage was informal—not legal—you understand me?"

Jane stopped short in the shrubby path, and stared him in the face.

"*Not legal*, Will! What nonsense! We were married in a church."

"Just so, my dear; but it seems one can be married in a church and yet illegally. We were not of age. I was only twenty, as you know, and you were seventeen. The law called us minors, and minors cannot be legally married without the consent of their parents or guardians. Then, again, I married you under an assumed name. I called myself *Wilfrid Stanley*, you remember, so that my father might not hear of it, and that was all wrong, too, it appears."

"But, Will, you got a licence."

"Yes; but—I never told you before—I had to declare we were both of age before they would let me have it. I didn't think it signified, you know. I never supposed it would make any difference to the marriage itself."

"And what difference *can* it make?" said Jane hotly.

"You are my husband and I am your wife. Nothing can alter that."

"But, my dear child, you don't understand me. I am *not* your husband, and you are *not* my wife. We have never been married at all."

The colour forsook her blooming face now, and left it deadly pale.

"Will!" she said imploringly; "it *cannot* be true. A few words cannot make such a difference as that. Why, lots of people were married as young as we were. Do you mean to say that their marriages are all illegal as well as ours?"

"Not if their parents consented to them, or if no one has taken the trouble to set them aside. But don't look so frightened, Jane. It is not an irremediable mistake. We can easily be married over again."

"But these two years?" she said with trembling lips.

"Now don't be silly and make a fuss about it. You have too much good sense for that. Mr. Parfitt certainly surprised me a little by declaring our marriage to be irregular, and in fact no marriage at all; and I felt I wanted a little time to think it over before I met you again. But it's nothing to grizzle at, though it will be better, perhaps, for us not to see each other so often until the ceremony can be properly performed."

"But why should there be any delay?" asked the girl breathlessly. "Why can't we be married again at once? Oh, Will! it is imperative we should be. You must get a proper licence and marry me publicly as soon as ever you can. It is the very least thing you owe me now."

"Really, Jane, you are taking a very unpleasant view of the matter, and I wish you would not speak as though I were to blame. You know I thought the ceremony as legal as you did. I only erred in ignorance of the law."

"Of course; but now we know it, we must not delay a moment to set matters right. Oh, Will! when *can* it be? I shall be miserable until I am really your wife."

"Well, as we have waited two years," said Sir Wilfrid, with a slight laugh, "I think we may wait a little longer. You see, Jane, it would look very queer for me to marry you in such a hurry, and just as I have come into this fortune. People might say there had been pressure somewhere. Don't you think it will be wiser to go on quietly as we have done for a few weeks longer, and then, when the season is over, we will be married in due form, and go abroad for a little while before I introduce you at Lambcote?"

"Go on for weeks longer!" repeated Jane; "go on living with the load you have given me to bear to-night for five or

six weeks longer, feeling that all this time I have never been your wife, that I have only been—— Oh, my God! I dare not think of it. No, no, Will, it cannot be. I will not consent to it. You must marry me at once. Do you hear?—*at once*. It will be hard enough even then to look back on the last two years, and remember how we have passed them. Oh! how I wish I had never known it! I feel as if it had taken all the pleasure out of being Lady Ewell, or Lambscote, or—or—anything,” and here Jane took out her handkerchief and began to cry.

“Now, look here, Janie,” said Sir Wilfrid, “if you’re going to make a row I shall go back to town. I don’t want Miss Prosser, nor that snob Cobble, to hear all about our private affairs. I have always praised you for being such a sensible girl. Try and be sensible now. We *are* married—to all intents and purposes—and never shall be more so. You don’t suppose that a mere informality, done out of ignorance, makes any difference in God’s sight, do you? Of course, since it *was* irregular, we’ll do it over again, for the law’s sake, and because things must be put right for you; but it can’t be immediately—it is *impossible*—so put the idea out of your head. In a couple of months, say, if you’ll be patient, we will be married again with all the legality possible to be put into it.”

“And if I should die meanwhile?” demanded Jane, in a voice of despair.

“Nonsense, child! You won’t die; and if you should, you’ll go to a place where you won’t want priests, nor lawyers either. But that is idle talking. Come! Give me a kiss, and think no more about it. It’s done and can’t be undone. Least said, soonest mended.”

But Jane would not give the kiss he asked for. Usually she was ready enough to comply with all his demands, for she loved him with a depth and fervour of which he had no idea, and which he would not have comprehended even if he had recognised it. She did not sob nor cry aloud, for her emotion, however deep, was never noisy; but she could not command her voice sufficiently to speak to him, and Sir Wilfrid knew, from the frequency with which she used her handkerchief, that the tears were running down her cheeks. The sight annoyed and ruffled him.

“I wish to goodness,” he said impatiently, “that I had never told you what Parfitt said about it. You were per-

fectly happy in your ignorance, and I should have kept the matter to myself. It would have been much the wiser plan."

"*Kept the matter to yourself!*" repeated Jane, in a tone of surprise. "What! Let me go on, as I have done, believing myself to be your wife! Will, you cannot be in earnest! You would not be so wicked as that!"

"What would there be wicked in it, any more than there has been in the last two years?"

"Then, we did not know. Now, we do," said Jane mournfully.

"Well, don't talk any more about it, Jane; at least, not now. It will soon be set right, and until it is, let us forget the subject was ever started. I came here to enjoy myself, not to look at a long face like yours. Did I tell you that the Ridleys have decided to cut their tour short and return home next month, so that I shall probably take possession of Lambscote in August after all? Isn't it jolly? Lady Ewell writes me word they have cut the hay, and it is a finer crop than they have had for years, and there is promise of a most abundant harvest. Everything seems to smile upon my inheritance—except you, indeed, who have most reason to do it. And you are looking as glum as an undertaker."

"But I *am* glad, dear Will—you know I am—and I will try to smile—only—this news has been such a shock to me! It is difficult to get over it all at once."

"More fool you, when I tell you there's nothing to be shocked about," was Sir Wilfrid's answer. "Hulloa! What a lovely rose! I don't think I ever saw one of so deep a damask before! Let me put it in your hair, Jane. That's it. That's how you'll have to dress your hair every evening for dinner when you are Lady Ewell, for there are roses enough at Lambscote to deck yourself with from head to foot, if you have a mind to do it."

"I love roses," said Jane, with quivering lips and the ghost of a smile, as he fastened the flower in her hair. But though she tried hard to do as he asked her, and hide the melancholy that oppressed her heart, it was too difficult a task, and the tears kept welling in her eyes each time she looked at him. She shrank from his embraces too, as if they even had become wrong, under existing circumstances, until Sir Wilfrid grew really angry, and declared his determination to return

to town that night. He thought that Jane would repent of her disposition then and implore him to remain, but she did no such thing. She let him go, almost without a word, and wandered about the garden for the remainder of the evening, brooding over what he had told her.

How she regretted the impetuous folly that had led her into such a dilemma! How she wished she had had a mother, capable of directing her right—one to whom she might have confided her secret with safety! But the poor child had been left to guide herself as best she might, and the result was that she sobbed herself to sleep that night with the bitterest tears she had ever shed.



CHAPTER IX.

ADVISED.

SIR WILFRID EWELL was in an evil temper for two days after this interview with Jane Warner. He could not understand the dismay with which she had received the intelligence he had conveyed to her, and, like most men in their dealings with women, he did not take the trouble to find out what made the difference in their feelings on the subject. The sexes do not understand each other, and never will. They fancy they do sometimes, when love blinds their senses, but they have only to be cured of passion to find out how seldom their spirits have been mated with their bodies. At the best they are but necessary evils to the comfort of each other's existence in this lower world—and were it not so, the angels would not have been represented as sexless beings.

Sir Wilfrid no more understood Jane Warner, who had been his wife for two years, than he understood the crossing-sweeper to whom he threw a copper in the street. He considered her foolish, and unreasonable, and unjust. Her tears seemed like a reproach to him, for not having been more careful of her good name and reputation, and though he told himself repeatedly at this time that he had every intention of doing what was right and marrying her over again, yet the very frequency with which he alluded to his honour and his sense of justice proved that the *inclination* was waxing feebler day by day. This knowledge was of itself sufficient to put Sir Wilfrid out of temper, and so he visited it upon Jane, and almost determined not to go near the cottage again until he was prepared to carry out his promise to her. Meanwhile he had plenty of occupation and amusement to distract his thoughts.

Lady Otto St. Blase and her daughter were not the sort of women to let the grass grow under their feet when once they had made up their minds to carry a project through.

The little Sunday dinner to which the mother had invited him when they met at the Westerleys had been succeeded by several attentions of a similar nature. Now it was a stall for

the theatre, or a seat in an opera-box, or an invitation for some big ball or garden-party, sent through their influence by the reigning millionaire of the season. And on one and all of such occasions Sir Wilfrid was sure to find himself by the side of Lena St. Blase for the whole of the afternoon or evening, singled out, as it were, by general consent as her especial cavalier.

Is it necessary to describe the feelings to which such constant opportunities soon gave rise? It is true that she had repulsed him in the days gone by with more than ordinary disdain.

And had he *loved* this woman—had his former sentiments for her been built upon the virtues which he fancied she possessed, their downfall, revealing as it did the worst side of her character, must have disenchanted him for ever.

But he had not *loved* her! Love is too sacred a thing to name in the same breath with the feelings that Lena's beauty had excited in his breast. And, therefore, there was no reason he should not pass through the same experience over again. Her beauty was as patent as before, and his blood ran as hotly through his veins. It is not to be wondered at, then, that in a short time she had made Sir Wilfrid forget everything that was unpleasant in the past, and remember only that she was lovely, and if he chose he might make her his own.

And Miss St. Blase made him understand the latter fact very plainly, and at a very early stage of their revived intimacy. Her manner towards him had so completely changed, he hardly knew her. Two years before—even whilst she coquetted with him, it had been the tyranny of a woman over a boy. But now she seemed to take the lower and more deferential place. She professed to look *up* to Sir Wilfrid, and ask his advice, or seek to find out his opinion before she ventured on giving her own. She had discovered his soft place, in fact, and knew how to play upon it.

Sir Wilfrid was not a clever man—indeed, an unprejudiced judge might have called him a fool—and so nothing tickled his vanity more than to be treated as if he were a second Solomon.

Jane, with her practical view of life, had been rather used to set him right on minor points, and to laugh him out of his little follies—to treat him, in fact, more like a mother

does her child, than a woman should her husband. So that the artifices of Lena St. Blase were very soothing in their mode of operation, and made him think he had never been properly appreciated before, and that, if he chose, he might become one of the leading lights of his country.

She prattled so prettily about the position he would hold in the county, and what would be in consequence expected of him, and the immense influence he might exert for the good of his fellow creatures that Sir Wilfrid began to wonder how Parliament had ever got on without him.

And whilst the fair creature whispered all her hopes and fears for his future in the most secluded corner of the ball-room, his eyes were devouring the numerous charms over which he leaned, and his heart sighing because he believed he could never be bold enough to break the chain which separated him from them.

At first, when he found that his old feelings with regard to Lena St. Blase were in course of revival, Sir Wilfrid was rather remorseful, and took himself to task for inconstancy and vice. Men and women do not plunge all at once from one mode of life to another.

For two years he had considered Jane Warner to be his wife, without the chance of change, and it took some little time to disabuse his mind of the idea. But as the new passion grew, and became more and more a thing to be desired in his eyes, he began to weigh the possibility of gratifying it. He kept on telling himself that he *must* do his duty by Jane, and yet he felt more and more every day that he could not live his life without Lena.

The lawyer, Mr. Parfitt did not leave him alone upon the subject, and since his advice tallied with the young man's own wishes, his influence over him in this particular gained strength every day. His very manner of mentioning the subject was calculated to make his client ashamed of it.

"Well, Sir Wilfrid," he would say, after having discussed taxation and drainage and rents; "and have you made up your mind what to do respecting the young woman at Chelsea?"

"Mr. Parfitt, I must beg of you not to speak of the lady you allude to in those terms. I have already told you that she is my wife."

"And you'll forgive me, I hope, Sir Wilfrid, but I have already told you that she is *not* your wife."

"Well, well! It's all the same thing. We have always considered ourselves married, and we intend to be so on the first favourable opportunity."

"I am *very* sorry to hear it," replied the lawyer.

"*Sorry to hear it!* What do you mean? Sorry to hear that I am about to behave like a man of honour? How could you suspect me of doing anything else?"

"If I considered it obligatory on you to marry this young person, Sir Wilfrid, I should be the first to urge you to the step. But I do not. Simply and plainly, without any humbug about the matter, I do *not!*"

"Then you and I differ in our estimate of the word 'honour.'"

"Possibly so, sir! Yet the truth remains. A minor is not responsible for any debts he may contract, whether monetary or of a less easily payable nature, and nothing but your own inclination need compel you to enter into a connection which will so seriously militate against your future prospects. You should think of your future prospects, Sir Wilfrid, and of those who may come after you. It is your duty—a painful one, perhaps—but still a duty."

The young Baronet looked miserable, and sucked the top of his Malacca cane, and Mr. Parfitt, perceiving his advantage, went on:

"You must exonerate me of all interest in this matter, Sir Wilfrid. It can make no possible difference to me, personally, *whom* you marry. But I speak boldly, for your father's and mother's sake, for the sake of your sisters, and the dead cousin through whom you inherit the property. You owe something to them, sir—something to the good old name you take from them. I shouldn't mind betting an even thousand that if you take this young person to Lambscote as your wife, the name of Ewell will go down a hundred per cent. at once, and be accounted as nothing in a few year's time. And the blot will rest on your children after you, Sir Wilfrid. They will never be able to hold up their heads in the county, as their grandfather and great-grandfather did before them."

"You are making out a very hard case of it, Parfitt."

"I'm telling you the truth, Sir Wilfrid, that is all. I tell

you that you would lose less caste in Somerset by settling Miss Warner at Lambcote, under her present name, than by making her Lady Ewell. No, no! my advice to you is—pension her off.”

“She would never agree to such a thing,” cried the Baronet indignantly.

“She would *have* to agree to it, Sir Wilfrid, if you spoke the word. Now, look at the thing in a sensible light, sir. You are no more married to that young woman than you are to my housemaid. You have been providentially saved from binding yourself to her, and you will be a madman if you make the connection irrevocable. For heaven’s sake be reasonable. Think of the excellent marriage you may make when free, of the credit you may shed on your own name and your children’s, and don’t throw away every chance in life for a chimerical idea of honour. The young person will feel it, doubtless—so will you, sir, if I mistake not—and the regret will be honourable to both of you. But men have had to sacrifice their inclinations to their duty before your day, Sir Wilfrid, and I do not doubt that you are as capable of performing an heroic action as any of them. And you will do it, sir, for the sake of what you owe to Society and your friends. You will do it!”

To tell Wilfred Ewell that he would be doing an heroic and unselfish action in disowning Jane Warner’s claims upon him was the very way to make him do it. He wanted an excuse to get out of the dilemma in which he found himself. He was too great a coward to do wrong whilst it was called wrong; but when his counsellors called wrong right, he was quite ready to fall in with their views of the subject. He did not tell Mr. Parfitt on this occasion that he should take his advice, but he thanked him for it, and promised to think it over. And the result was, that the more he thought, the more feasible it seemed to him to follow it.

After all, what would be Jane’s loss? She loved him, true; but thousands of people who love each other are compelled to part in this world, and she would not be worse off than others. She was very young, too—only nineteen—and had plenty of years before her in which to forget.

And then, as to their marriage, no one knew of it except, indeed, Parfitt, who looked on it in the same light as any other *liaison*. If the marriage had been made public—known

to her friends and relations, or followed by any inconvenient results—that would have been a very different matter. *Then*, of course, he should have been obliged to acknowledge and make it binding; but under existing circumstances, who was the wiser, and who was the worse? Jane would go on living in Chelsea as she would have done if she had never met him, and though he should always be her friend, and render her assistance if necessary, he could not see why he should stand in the way of her making a suitable marriage any more than she in his. And Sir Wilfrid started from his dream of approaching freedom to keep an appointment on the river with Lady Otto St. Blase, where he was to pass the afternoon wrapt in another dream of coming bondage, evoked by the languid looks and veiled glances of her lovely daughter.



CHAPTER X.

ACCEPTED.

PERHAPS there is no material pleasure more enjoyable than that of floating down the banks of our beautiful Thames on a calm summer's day. It possesses an indolent peace unknown to the ever-changing ocean, and a quiet freshness unknown to the stirring busy land. It keeps us hovering for a little while, as it were, between earth and heaven, and persuades us to lay aside our cares and anxieties until we reach the landing-stage again. Sir Wilfrid Ewell felt this keenly as he found himself gliding down the river, with his eyes on a level with those of Lena St. Blase, and all four eyes well protected from public observation by the shelter of her lace parasol. Jane Warner, and the cottage at Chelsea, and the irregular marriage, went out of his mind altogether as he talked to his fair companion and felt that warm glow stealing through his veins which makes us feel as if we no longer belonged to this earth when in the presence of anyone for whom we have conceived a tender passion.

The party, which was a large one, occupied a steam launch engaged to take them down to Maidenhead to dine, and home again by moonlight. That is the way we take our solemn pleasures in the nineteenth century. Men are getting too lazy to row—indeed, the majority of them make but a poor appearance in the exercise of that accomplishment—and women are becoming too fastidious to run the chance of crushing their silk and muslin costumes by squeezing them into the stern of a rowing-boat. The days are past when a light print dress and a straw hat were considered sufficient adornment for a pic-nic or a water-party, and with the costliness of the material comes the anxiety for its preservation.

Sir Wilfrid, looking with admiration on Miss St. Blase, robed in a delicate white India muslin, profusely trimmed with Valenciennes, and her head crowned with an airy nothing of tulle, held together by rosebuds, thought he had never seen a girl more simply and elegantly attired. He

would have been rather astonished if anyone had informed him that her simple costume had cost as much as her mother's elaborate dress of silk and velvet, and that (take her from top to toe) she had never been turned out under a matter of thirty pounds. It requires marriage and the Christmas bills to enlighten a man on these trivial points.

Sir Wilfrid was married, but not yet enlightened; for beyond an occasional present in the way of a dress, or a bonnet, poor Jane had never troubled him to put his hand in his pocket for her. But he drew no comparisons (pleasant or otherwise) between the two women to-day. His mind was filled with but one object, and that object was Lena St. Blase.

Lady Otto was not in a good humour that morning. The river-party was not her own. She was only invited to it in common with the rest, and when she stepped on board the steam-launch, she found, to her dismay, that Captain Dorsay was among the guests. She had no notion that he was acquainted with their host and hostess, and was quite ready to believe that he had angled for an invitation in order to secure a day in the company of her daughter—perhaps ever to try and put a spoke in the wheel of Sir Wilfrid Ewell's suit. The idea made her crazy with vexation. And when Sir Wilfrid's cause was evidently gaining such ground too!

Lena had begun to talk of her marriage to him as quite a decided thing, and the baronet was at their house (or in their society) every day. And here had this odious Captain Dorsay thrust himself into their company with the design, probably, of upsetting all her plans. And the worst of it was, that no one but Lady Otto would have called Jack Dorsay odious. He was a singularly handsome and attractive-looking man—far more so than Wilfrid Ewell—and had an air of fashion about him that was very taking with the fair sex. It is true that he bore a bad character—that he was said to have been inculpated in several disreputable affairs with women, and that he was a gambler, and well known on the race-course and in the betting-ring. But when did such reports, true or otherwise, influence a woman with regard to a man to whom she has taken a fancy? Though the proofs be startling as Gospel writ, she declares they are falsehoods; and when she is compelled to confess she has been mistaken, she swears she likes him all the better for his wickedness.

This is not necessarily love on the part of the weaker sex. It is far oftener obstinacy, and a dogged determination to have their own way.

Lena St. Blase had played this game for some little time with her mother, and at one period Lady Otto had almost despaired of preventing her marrying Captain Dorsay. And she would never have done so had not Captain Dorsay himself come to her assistance. He was not a marrying man. He had no intention of so committing himself. He liked to flirt with Lena, and would flirt with her to the end; but married or single made no difference to him—indeed, of the two, he would rather she were married than not. It made it so impossible for any one to ask him his intentions. Lena, on the other hand, was an excellent match for him. She liked his attentions, and felt flattered by his admiration, but she would never have dreamt of giving up an eligible match for his sake, or indeed of marrying him at all whilst he had so little money. *Pas si bête.*

But Lady Otto had not the same faith in her daughter that Lena had in herself. She was always afraid, whilst the acquaintanceship lasted, that the girl might be drawn into doing something foolish, and she had gone the length of forbidding Captain Dorsay her house, simply to keep him out of the way. And here he had turned up on the steam-launch, at the time of all others when she could have wished him a thousand miles distant, with Lena looking her best in her pretty white costume, and the proposal of marriage actually hovering on Sir Wilfrid's lips. What should she do if the inopportune presence of that odious man put all her matrimonial hopes for her daughter to flight? She frowned visibly as she caught his eye, and gave him the coldest of bows in recognition; but Jack Dorsay was not the sort of man to be put down by an old lady's frown. He smiled in answer, as though they were the best of friends, and immediately made his way to Lena's side. Miss St. Blase received him with decided warmth.

Sir Wilfrid had not yet made his appearance, and the coast was clear. In a few minutes the pair were engaged in an animated conversation. Lady Otto was in an agony. She walked straight up to her daughter, and desired her to take her arm.

"What for, mamma?" demanded Lena languidly.

"I wish to speak to you at once. You will be kind enough to do as I ask you."

Her mother's tone was so imperative, that the girl was compelled to comply. As soon as they were out of earshot, Lady Otto turned round upon her.

"Lena, I must know the truth, or I shall refuse to accompany the party to Maidenhead. Do you intend to flirt with that man Dorsay to-day, or not?"

"What difference can it make to you, mamma, what I do?"

"This difference, that if Sir Wilfrid sees the bold way in which Captain Dorsay presumes to look at you, he will assuredly draw back himself. And unless you give me your promise not to permit Dorsay to interfere with his plans, I shall take you home."

"Of course I shan't let him interfere. You know I mean to marry Wilfrid Ewell. Why should I be such a fool?"

"Because all women are fools where men are concerned. But if you intend to abide by your word, you must let Captain Dorsay understand the true state of affairs."

"I can't tell him I'm engaged when I'm not."

"You can make him think so without compromising yourself. You probably will be engaged before we return this evening. It will be your own fault if you are not. And now, Lena, which is it to be, Maidenhead or home?"

"What nonsense, mamma! Haven't I told you already that Captain Dorsay shall not interfere with my prospects; and you had better let me go back now, and give him a hint before Sir Wilfrid arrives."

"What did your mother want?" demanded her cavalier, as soon as she had reseated herself. "She looked awfully cross. More warnings against poor me?"

"Indeed no. You always think people must be talking about *you*, Captain Dorsay. We had something of much more importance to discuss. My behaviour."

"Have you been naughty, then?"

"Mamma says so. There is a person coming to Maidenhead with us to-day for whom she thinks me not half good enough."

"A man, of course, and possibly a millionaire. Have you really reached the winning-post, then?"

"Not quite. But I am on the road to it, and you are to be very good, and not make anyone jealous. Do you understand?"

"That means, . . . suppose, that I am to give up all my privileges as soon as M. le Millionaire arrives?"

"Something like it. But, you know, we must be discreet sometimes, and sacrifice our inclinations to what is expedient."

"I understand you perfectly, *ma belle*, and you will not find me so selfish as to spoil your chance. You will always be my friend, I know, whatever happens."

"Always! You may be sure of that."

"And, to tell you the truth, since I am such an unlucky devil as not to be able to win you for myself, I would rather you were married than single. Your mother is such an awful dragon! But a husband will be tired of guarding you after the first three months."

"Oh, you naughty man! I shall be demoralized if I listen to you any longer."

"Well, tell me something to keep me quiet, then. Who is the lucky fellow?"

"Sir Wilfrid Ewell. There he is, just come on board. But it's not settled yet, remember. Now, you'll be very good, won't you, and not look at me any more to-day?"

"I will not, 'pon honour, unless he gives me the chance, and you would not expect me to miss a chance, would you? It is my pride that I have never done so yet. Adieu, *charmante*! I will go at once, and devote myself to the next best-looking woman on board. But it is an awful bore, isn't it? You will believe in the strength of my devotion for you now."

Lena felt it to be an "awful bore," too. She would have much preferred Captain Dorsay's attentions to those of Wilfrid Ewell. But she was as heartless and worldly as her so-called lover, and quite saw the expediency of following her mother's direction in this particular. So Sir Wilfrid was welcomed by the tenderest of smiles, and sheltered under the white parasol, as though he had a perfect right to claim half of everything she possessed.

Notwithstanding Captain Dorsay's promise, however, his eyes had an awkward knack of roving in the direction of Miss St. Blase, until Sir Wilfrid noticed the admiration conveyed

by his glances, and asked his companion if he was a friend of hers.

"Who?—that gentleman?" responded Lena with apparent indifference. "Oh dear yes. We have known him a long time. He is Captain Dorsay, of the Irregulars."

"He seems very much fascinated by you, if one may judge by the constancy with which his eyes turn this way," said the Baronet jealously.

Miss St. Blase laughed.

"Do they? The silly fellow! Well, I suppose I may tell you, Sir Wilfred. I am sure it will be safe with you—but he is an admirer of mine; in fact, he wants to marry me, only——"

"Only *what*?" he inquired eagerly.

"I don't fancy him. He is very nice, you know, and all that, and comes of a first-rate family, but nothing will satisfy a woman except love. Mamma talks to me a great deal of expediency, and what is best for us all, and so forth——"

"Does your mother want you to marry him, then?" interposed Sir Wilfrid.

"She wants me to follow my own inclinations—that is, if they lead me right."

"But your inclinations don't lie in the direction of Captain Dorsay? Forgive me, Miss St. Blase, if I seem impertinent in my anxiety for your happiness, but I cannot *quite* forget the past. I wish I could."

He sighed, and she sighed in answer to him.

"Indeed, nothing you say could ever seem impertinent to me. Ask me just what you like, Sir Wilfrid. No, my inclinations do not tend that way—you have guessed right."

"I am so thankful!" he ejaculated.

"Why should you be thankful? Do you know anything against him? Has he ever hurt you?"

"No, no! I never set eyes on him before to-day. I am only glad because you do not like him."

"I never said that—I like him very much. Only—I cannot marry him."

"Why not? Is he too poor?"

"Oh dear no! What a mercenary creature you must think me!"

"What is the reason then? He is very handsome, and distinguished-looking."

"So people tell me. He may be! But appearance is not sufficient for one's happiness in married life; nor to make a woman—*love* a man."

"Have you ever met a man whom you could love, Miss St. Blase?"

She cast down her eyes, and trembled.

Oh yes, she did. Women know how to flutter their hands so as their whole body shall appear to flutter also. Wilfrid watched the trembling hands, and began to tremble too, with hope.

"That is not a fair question," Lena said softly—and so he did not repeat it.

But as they were coming back in the moonlight, after a day passed in flattering words and tender looks, his heart grew bolder, and he determined to ask her that question over again.

Lena had behaved exquisitely throughout the expedition, and Lady Otto was charmed with her. She had hardly spoken to Captain Dorsay. Only once had they been thrown together at Maidenhead, unwitnessed by the rest of the party, and then such a scene had occurred between them as made up for any degree of coldness in public.

But, "What the eye does not see, the heart does not grieve over," and so neither Sir Wilfrid Ewell nor Lady Otto St. Blase was any the wiser or the worse for that little undiscovered episode; and as Lena stepped again on board the steam launch, aided by the young Baronet, the hand he held trembled in so interesting a manner, and the eyes he sought were cast so modestly upon the ground, that he could not but feel his time was come, and he had conquered.

He wrapt her fleecy shawl about her shoulders, and kept his place behind her chair all the way home, leaning over her, and whispering in her ear, as they glided over the silvery waters.

"What makes you tremble so? I am afraid you are cold," he said.

"No, I am not cold. I am quite comfortable, thank you. I wish you would not notice any of my little vagaries," replied Lena, with an agitated laugh.

"This has been a pleasant day, has it not? I hope you have enjoyed yourself," he continued.

"Oh, immensely! It has been *too* charming! It makes one feel sad to think it cannot come over again."

"Why should it not come over again all through one's life? I have had but one drawback to my perfect happiness."

"And what is that?"

"The presence of that fellow Dorsay. I cannot help feeling that he means to win you. He cannot keep his eyes away from you. He is very far gone indeed. I pity him—that is, if you do not reciprocate."

"I have already told you I do not. He is only a friend of mine, and knows he will never be anything else. But perhaps he has sufficient interest in me left to feel a little anxious about my happiness—that is all."

"Is it possible that any man who has once loved you can be content with your friendship only? I do not believe it. He must say it just to relieve your anxiety concerning him."

"But I have no anxiety on the subject. I dismissed him, and there is an end to it."

"Just as you dismissed me. I wonder if he felt what I did, when I heard my fate."

"Sir Wilfrid! I thought you promised me not to allude to that subject. It is very unkind of you. If you knew——"

"If I knew—*what?*"

"The influence that was exerted over me. Try and put yourself in my place. Supposing *I* had been the one to plead, and *you* to reject. Cannot you imagine how hard the task would have been, and how you would have hated to think of it afterwards—far more to hear it alluded to? Why will you humiliate me in such a cruel manner?"

"My dear Miss St. Blase, forgive me! But, you see, I *could* not suppose such a thing, because—the cases are so different. *You* to plead and *I* to reject! How could it be possible, when I loved you so? How could it *ever* be possible, feeling—feeling—as——"

"I know—I understand," she faltered; "but supposing the cases are *not* so different, after all? Supposing—that I——"

"Well—well—go on. For heaven's sake don't keep me in suspense!" he exclaimed eagerly.

"Oh, Sir Wilfrid! what have I said? What would you have me say?"

"A little more, Lena, or a little less. I don't know if I am

a fool ; but if I am you have made me so. May I put that question to you once more? May I plead again, and hear if you reject?"

"I am listening," she answered faintly.

"You know what my position is as well as I do—will you share it? Will you take back those cruel words of two years ago, and say I am not too presumptuous now in asking you to be my wife?"

"Yes, yes! They were not *my* words, believe me, and I recall them thankfully. I will be all that you may wish me, if you will promise on your part never to remember them again."

"*Never!* my dearest, *never!* Oh! do you know how happy you have made me? I feel half wild with joy. When shall we leave this confounded boat and reach the shore? What a penance it is not to be able to thank you properly for your sweet consent! Oh, Lena! I will do all I can to repay you for your gracious answer to me."

"I shall be repaid sufficiently. I have no fear of that," she replied, as modestly as if he had been the first man who had ever looked love into her eyes. "But don't let these people guess what we have been talking about, Wilfrid. Had you not better leave me for a little? Suppose you go and tell mamma. * She has been so anxious about me. She will rejoice to hear it is all right at last."

Sir Wilfrid did as she desired him, and took a seat by Lady Otto. But he felt very much constrained as he did so. By the side of Lena, heated by wine and inflamed with passion, he had thought of nothing but gaining possession of her, and of hearing her revoke the words which had rankled in his breast for years. But to have to inform her mother that he had asked her to be his wife, and she had consented, seemed to plunge him into a moral shower-bath. He had done the deed then, which he had longed for, but dreaded, for weeks past. He had actually proposed to Miss St. Blase, and been accepted by her. He had compromised himself to set aside that first marriage—to cast off Jane Warner—and to take another wife to his bosom. Until he sat down by Lady Otto and tried to frame the words in which to convey the news to her, he did not seem to have realized what he had done. Yesterday it had seemed far away—something quite uncertain, and so distinctly in the future. To-day it was actually

an accomplished fact. A moment of delirious longing—a convenient proximity—a few impassioned words—and he had done what he never could undo. He had pledged himself to put away Jane Warner and to marry Lena St. Blase. The proportions of the deed he had committed himself to, seemed all at once to assume such magnitude that he turned sick and dizzy, and Lady Otto asked him if he were ill.

"I feel rather giddy," he said, in answer. "I think it must be the smell of the engine-oil. Have you not perceived it rather strong all day?" And without further remark he left her side again, and walked to the other end of the vessel. He was all on the alert when they reached Richmond, and squeezed Lena's hand until he hurt her, as he wished the ladies good-night; but Miss St. Blase was very much astonished on reaching home to find that her mother was still ignorant of the important event that had occurred.

"Well, mamma," she said, as they entered their own house; "and so you see, I have accomplished my little business. What did you say to him when he told you of it?"

"Told me of *what*? Who are you speaking of?"

"Why, of Sir Wilfrid, of course! Didn't he tell you we are engaged?"

"No! When did it happen? He never said a word on the subject. My dear child, let me congratulate you. But how very strange that Sir Wilfrid should not have informed me of it!"

"Very. Particularly as he left me on purpose to do so. Yes; it's all right. He asked me plump as we were coming home, and, of course, I said 'Yes.' I suppose he'll come bothering here to-morrow to tell you of it."

"Have you made any appointment with him?"

"No; we didn't exchange ten words after the important business was concluded."

"How very odd! Perhaps his agitation upset him! He looked ill to me, though he denied it."

"Perhaps he had had too much champagne," laughed her daughter carelessly, "and will want to cry off to-morrow!"

"Don't talk of such a thing, my dear. The General would soon bring him to book if he did. No! No! There is no fear of that. Sir Wilfrid is far too honourable by nature; besides, anyone can see how much in love he is with

you. Well, you are a very lucky girl! That's my opinion, and I hope you think so too."

Lena yawned.

"I am sure I don't know. The only thing I'd swear to at the present moment is being very sleepy. You don't know the trouble I had to bring him to the scratch. He swam round and round and round like a fish suspicious of the bait, till I was nearly sick of him. It's tired me out. I hate your modest, shy young men, who daren't say 'Bo' to a goose! What's a man worth if he can't say what he wants? I hope to goodness Sir Wilfrid won't try the 'proper' dodge when we're married, or I shall kick over the traces. You know what I am, mamma; and I'm sure to do it."

"Never mind what he does after marriage, my dear," said Lady Otto soothingly. "The game will be in your own hands then, and you can act as you think proper. But keep him in a good temper now, whatever you do, for I'm afraid he's a little hasty. Don't show your hand too soon, Lena. You know you lost Lord Ambrose Pomell only through that. Be more careful this time, my dear, for both our sakes, and as soon as you are Lady Ewell you can do as you like."



CHAPTER XL

SUSPECTED.

IF Sir Wilfrid Ewell had been sullen for two days after his last interview with Jane Warner, he was unhappy for many more than two days after his last interview with Lena St. Blase. He had obtained the object of his desire. He had won the prize after which he panted. He had received the assurance which he had believed would make him happy for ever. And yet he was not happy. On the contrary, he felt very miserable. Of course, he was fluttered and excited, still more so when he had paid his first call in Onslow Gardens after the water-party, and been received by Lady Otto as a son-in-law, and by Lena as her future husband.

The date of the wedding, too, had already been discussed, and all but decided on, and Miss St. Blase had hinted to him, with downcast eyes, that she would like of all things to visit Spain for the honeymoon. So that matter was settled and done with.

He was actually to possess the goddess who had appeared to be so far above his reach, and whilst in her presence it would have been strange if he could have thought of anything less agreeable. But when he found himself alone, things looked very different.

Indeed, at this period of his life he seemed to be two men—one made up of glowing hopes and fond anticipation, the other full of remorse and contempt for himself, and what he contemplated doing. He would sit and argue the point with his conscience for hours in his chambers, but he never arrived at a solution of the difficulty. He knew he had gained what he most wanted in this world, and it seemed wonderful in his own eyes that he did not feel more happy in its possession.

Of course, it was the thought of Jane Warner that interfered with his complete contentment, and he was almost ready to curse the poor girl for having come in his way and tempted him to commit an imprudence for which he would probably have to pay to his life's end.

Why couldn't he have been satisfied to flirt with her and make love to her without going through that unfortunate ceremony, which had turned out to be as absurd as it was ill-timed?

He must appeal to Jane's common-sense—she had plenty of that, it was the best thing about her. He would point out to her the utter impossibility of his fulfilling the promise he had made. He would convince her of the blight it would cast upon his prospects, of the entanglement it would cause with Miss St. Blase—in fact, he would tell her *it could not be*, and she must rest satisfied with his assurance.

After all, they were not married—Parfitt had said so a dozen times—and he was free to do as he chose.

Yet he put off the evil hour from day to day. He did not avoid seeing Lena St. Blase—indeed, he was almost always at her mother's house; but he *did* avoid seeing Jane Warner, and weeks went by without his visiting Chelsea. He was too great a coward to encounter her reproaches, or give an answer to her questions. He wrote to her every now and then—just a line to say what he was doing—but his letters were very cool and distant, and made Jane's heart sink.

Once she had written and asked him—very humbly—if she might call and see him at his chambers, she was hungering so, she said, for the sight of his face, and the sound of his voice. But she received so determined a negative to her request, that she never dared to make such a proposal again.

Meanwhile, the Surbiton people were a thorn in the flesh of Sir Wilfrid Ewell. His mother professed, naturally, to be delighted at the idea of his engagement to Miss St. Blase. "Such an excellent match, such an unexceptionable alliance, so wonderfully suited to each other; such promise for a happy union!"

It was in terms like these that she cooed forth her satisfaction to the inhabitants of Surbiton, but at the same time the good lady felt that the excellent match was a "crusher" to all her hopes of sharing in her son's good fortune, and that it would be as well to make hay whilst the sun shone, which, being interpreted, meant to get all they could out of him whilst they were able.

Consequently, the Miss Ewells beset their brother with entreaties to take them to theatres, and operas, and such-like

shows, which included giving them suitable apparel in which to appear in public. And after a while, Sir Wilfrid began to be a little tired of it.

To have made *one* sister happy would have been easy, but to dress and take about *five* was a very different thing. First, he pleaded his social engagements as an obstacle to complying with their demands; next, his matrimonial engagement, which kept him at the beck and call of Lena St. Blase.

Little by little the elder Miss Ewells were made to understand how the land lay, and their hopes dwindled to nothing with the knowledge. But not so Rosie's. Sir Wilfrid would have given up an appointment even with Lena St. Blase to make Rosie happy. He dearly loved his youngest sister, and for every present the others received from him he gave her a dozen.

Mrs. Ewell frowned at first over his partiality. She said it was not fair that Rosie should have all the good things whilst her poor dear elder girls had to sup disappointment as their portion. She would have prevented Rosie accepting her brother's presents, and forbidden her accompanying him to town so often as she did, only she was too provident, on second thoughts, to bite off her nose to spite her face. Sir Wilfrid had made his mother plainly understand that he should consider Rosie to be under his care and guardianship henceforth, and that he only waited until he should be married and settled at Lambcote to take her to live with him, and provide for her altogether.

Mrs Ewell wept, and said it was hard that one sister should be reared in affluence, whilst her other poor darlings had to eat the bitter bread of poverty, but her son did not offer to relieve her of any more daughters, so she decided, on consideration, to take the goods the gods provided her.

Rosie was thenceforth looked upon as Wilfrid's property, and many a day did the delighted child spend with her brother at the horticultural *fêtes* or afternoon concerts, or any amusement which he thought would interest her. One evening he took her to the theatre, a rare occurrence, as her mother did not like her remaining out late. But this was the representation of a new piece which Sir Wilfrid was anxious to see, and for which he had secured a box at the last moment. He would have sent Rosie home beforehand, but she pleaded

so hard to stay, that he had not the heart to resist her, and so they went together. It was Saturday night, and the new piece, like most new pieces, took about twice as long as it should have done in representation, so that when the curtain fell, Sir Wilfrid found they had just missed the last train to Surbiton.

"This is awkward, Rosie," he said, consulting his watch; "I shall have to put you up for the night."

"Oh, lovely! capital!" cried the girl, clapping her hands.

"Yes, that's all very well, my dear, but you're a nuisance! What am I to do with you? I don't like to take you to an hotel, and the St. Blases are out of town till Monday. Let me see. I must take you down to Chelsea, where I used to live. I keep my rooms there still, and the Warners will manage to give you a bed."

"And you will stay, too, Wilfrid?"

"Oh, yes! I intended to have run over there to-morrow. I often spend Sunday with them. It's so nice and cool at Chelsea. Now, here's a hansom—jump in, and we'll be there in twenty minutes."

As they were driving along, he said to her rather awkwardly:

"You must be sure and not say a word about my engagement to the Warners, Rosie,"

"Don't they know it? Why, Wilfrid, I should have thought you would be so proud, you would tell everyone."

"I haven't told them, and you must promise me not to do so, either."

"Of course I won't, Wilfrid."

"You see," he went on hurriedly, "they're not in the same position as ourselves, and I don't care for congratulations and inquiries, and all that sort of thing. It will be time enough for them to know it when I'm married. But I'm sure I can trust you not to go chattering to lodging-house keepers."

"I should think you might," replied Rosie, "only I thought as you had lodged with them for so many years, and they seemed to look after you so nicely, and all that, that they would be interested in everything that concerns you. Of course they know you're a baronet."

"Oh, yes! you may say what you like on that score; but not a word, *mind*, about Miss St. Blase."

When they arrived at Wolsey Cottage, he left his sister in the cab, and walked up to the house alone. This time Sarah opened the door to him.

"Where's your mistress?"

"The old missus is in bed, sir; and Miss Jane's lying down in the parlour with a bad 'eadache. I don't think she expected you to-night, sir."

He did not answer her, but walked straight into the parlour.

As Jane saw him, she rose from the sofa with a slight cry.

"Oh, Will! I had quite given you up for to-night! What makes you so late, dear?"

"Hush! the girl's outside. Look here, Jane—I've brought my sister Rosie here for the night. Can you give her a bed?"

"How nice of you—of course I can! I will give her my own. Where is she?" demanded Jane, struggling to her feet.

"Don't make a fuss about it. Remember she knows *nothing*! Just treat her like any other young lady you see for the first time. We have been to the theatre, and lost the last train to Surbiton, so I thought it better to bring her here, than take her to an hotel; she is so young. Shall I fetch her in?"

"Yes, dear, at once! And don't be afraid; she shall learn nothing from me," replied Jane, as she hastily brushed away the tears that had rushed to her eyes at his cool reception of her.

In another minute he was back with Rosie, blushing, as young girls will blush, on a first introduction even to a lodging-house keeper.

"This is Miss Warner, Rosie, and she has promised to make you comfortable for the night."

"I will do my best, Miss Ewell," said Jane.

"Oh! don't take trouble about it—anything will do for me," replied Rosie, smiling; "and I'm sure I'm very lucky to be able to come here at all."

"If you are in a fix about it," said Sir Wilfrid to Jane, "I will give up my room to my sister, and sleep on the sofa, Miss Warner."

He pronounced the name very awkwardly; but the sound brought a rush of colour to poor Jane's cheek, that would have looked very suspicious in the eyes of a keen observer.

"There is no need," she answered quietly. "Miss Prosser happens to be spending her Sunday in the country, so that I shall occupy her room, and give mine to your sister."

"And can you give us any supper?" he asked more briskly. "I'm awfully hungry, for one."

"I have a rumpsteak I got in, in case you came; and it will be ready in half-an-hour, if you can wait so long. I will see about it at once."

She left the room as she spoke, and descended to the kitchen.

"Isn't it very late to ask her to cook anything, Wilfrid?" said Rosie. "It seems giving her so much trouble."

"Never mind, she is accustomed to it," he answered. "I used to have my supper at all sorts of times when I lived here."

"Is that Jane Warner whom I have heard you speak of?" asked his sister. "How pretty she is, Wilfrid, and how ladylike! I should never have taken her for a lodging-house keeper. And she speaks just like one of us, too. I like her awfully."

"Well, she is a gentlewoman, Rosie, though in reduced circumstances. Her father was in the Royal Navy. Poor Jane! Yes, she certainly is very nice-looking, and has 'a low, sweet voice, an excellent thing in woman.'"

"Why do you say *poor* Jane? Is she unhappy?"

The question startled Sir Wilfrid.

"Not that I am aware of."

"She looks sad, I think," continued the girl. "Perhaps she has some trouble."

"We all have troubles," said her brother.

"Yes, I know; but I mean a love trouble. Her eyes looked so sad, even when she was talking of the rump-steak."

"You little goose!" laughed Sir Wilfrid; but the laugh was not an easy one. "What should you know about love, or any such nonsense? It is much more likely she was thinking how long it will take to make the fire burn up."

"Do you think so? I don't," replied Rosie.

Jane did not wait on them at table. She left the servant to do that. But when their supper was concluded, she appeared with a candle to light Rosie to bed.

"If you are ready, Miss Ewell, I will show you to your room."

"Quite ready!" exclaimed Rosie, jumping up and kissing her brother for good-night, "and *so* sorry to have kept you up so late. It *is* a shame of us."

"Oh, never mind that," replied Jane, smiling, "if I can only make you comfortable. *That* is Sir Wilfrid's room, you see, and *this* is yours, next to it, so you will feel quite safe."

"And is this where *you* generally sleep?" said Rosie, looking round the little fresh, white-curtained room.

"Yes," replied Jane.

"But why should you give it up to me? Oh, *don't!* Please sleep in your own room, and let me lie on a sofa, or anywhere."

"Indeed, I could not think of it, Miss Ewell. I shall occupy our lodger's room for to-night. But it will give me great pleasure if you will allow me to help you to undress."

As she rendered this homely office, the girls grew more familiar, and chatted freely together.

"You have known my brother a long time," said Rosie. "Isn't he a dear fellow?"

"He has always been very kind to me," replied Jane.

"He is, to everybody. He has given me, oh! such lovely things since he has been rich. A gold watch, and a brooch, and bangles. Look at my bangles! aren't they lovely? And, do you know, I am going to live with him at Lambcote—for good and all! Won't it be delightful? And I'm to have a horse to ride, and skates and a sleigh in the winter. I feel half crazy when I think of it."

"I am sure you will be very happy," said Jane.

"I couldn't be anything but happy with Wilfrid, and when he's married——" But here Rosie stopped short and coloured.

"Yes, when he's married," repeated Jane Warner quickly.

"Well, I suppose he will be married some day," continued Rosie, trying to get out of the dilemma in which she found herself. "Mamma says he owes it to his position in the county, and all that, you know. But I'm to live with him all the same. Nothing is to alter that."

"And—and—has Sir Wilfrid told you who his wife is to be?" asked Jane hesitatingly. Something—she knew not what—made her almost afraid to put the question.

"You mustn't ask me," replied Rosie with dancing eyes, brimful of mischief, "because I have promised Wilfrid faith

fully not to tell. But you'll hear some day. See if you don't. My brother is sure to tell you, because he looks on you as such an old friend. He does, indeed. He told me as we came along that he had lived here for so many years it felt just like his home. And he thinks you and your mother awfully kind people, and so attentive. How nice it would be if, when he is married, he should ask you to go and be his housekeeper at Lambscote Hall! Would you like it, Miss Warner—would you go and be housekeeper at Lambscote if Wilfrid were to ask you to do so?"

"I don't think so, dear—I mean Miss Ewell," replied Jane, blushing. "I don't think I shall ever go to Lambscote as a housekeeper."

"Why not? Do you think you're too young? Don't you like waiting on Wilfrid? I should if—if I were *you*."

"I *do* like it—very much," said Jane, blushing still more deeply; "but if you are quite ready now, Miss Ewell, I will leave you, for I have to be up early to-morrow morning."

She left the room suddenly, almost before she had received an answer, for she felt as if she dared not trust herself to talk to Rosie any longer. And the girl observed her want of ease, and placed her own construction on it.

"And how did you sleep?" inquired Sir Wilfrid of his sister, as they met at breakfast in his sitting-room the following morning.

"Oh, charmingly, delightfully! Nothing could have been more comfortable," exclaimed Rosie enthusiastically. "And do you know, Miss Warner was *so* kind. She undressed me herself, and I have been in the garden with her for a long time this morning."

"And so you like Jane?"

"*Very* much! I think she is so nice and lady-like—much more like a lady than half the people you meet. Wilfrid," she went on presently, "do you remember what I said about her last night?"

"What was that?" he demanded, pretending to forget.

"That she had some love-trouble. Well, I think I've found it out too. Now, don't laugh, Wilfrid, before I've done. She's in love with *you*."

He did not laugh. He grew angry.

"What absurd rubbish! I do beg, Rosie, you will not

repeat such nonsense. If this is the kind of talk my mother has allowed you to indulge in, the sooner you are out of her care the better."

"But, Wilfrid, don't be so cross, and listen to me. She didn't *tell* me so."

"I should sincerely hope not! I think too well of her for that."

"But I discovered it—I am sure I did—from her confusion and her blushes. I asked her if she would like to come and be our housekeeper at Lambcote—there was no harm in that, you know—and she got, oh! so red! and said she would never go to Lambcote as a housekeeper. And from other things—a lot of little things—I could see quite plainly she is fond of you. And I'm sure it's not to be wondered at. So handsome as you are, and so kind! I don't believe any girl could live in the same house with you for two years and not fall in love with you. It's only natural."

"That's all very well for *you* to say or to think, Rosie," replied Wilfrid; "but you seem to forget the difference between Miss Warner's position and mine. She would never presume——"

But here he paused, unable to complete the cowardly sentence.

"Oh, that's nonsense, Wilfrid! A cat may look at a king!" cried his sister merrily; "and I'm sure Jane Warner's not a cat—not half such a cat as——"

"What were you going to say?" demanded her brother.

"I shan't tell you," replied Rosie impudently; but he knew as well as if she had completed her sentence, that she was about to draw a comparison between Jane Warner and Lena St. Blase.

Seeing how the land lay, Sir Wilfrid thought it advisable to take her away from Wolsey Cottage as soon as possible. So, when breakfast was concluded, he told her they must not keep her mother in suspense longer than necessary, and took her back to Surbiton. What was his horror on seeing her, at parting, throw her arms round Jane Warner's neck and kiss her effusively.

"Thank you—thank you so much," she exclaimed, "for all you have done for me, and I hope I shall come back and see you again, *very soon*."

"What on earth did you mean by that, Rosie?" he said testily as they drove away from the door."

"By what?"

"By kissing Miss Warner in that manner. You ought to remember the difference in your station."

"But you told me yourself that she is a lady, Wilfrid."

"Well, her father was a gentleman, certainly; but Jane has been brought up to a life of dependence, and it is the associations, you know, that widen the distance in these cases."

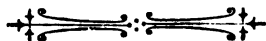
He was using, unconsciously to himself, the same argument the lawyer had used to him.

"Well, I consider she is a lady, and I choose to kiss her," replied his sister stoutly; and I think, too, you are rather ungrateful, Wilfrid, after all they have done for you."

"Rubbish!" he returned angrily. "I have paid them regularly, and what on earth can lodging-house keepers want more?"

But as soon as he had placed Rosie in her mother's care, he returned to Chelsea. He was terribly vexed at what he had heard.

"This must be put a stop to," he thought—"a stop to *at once and for ever.*"



CHAPTER XII.

PARTED.

JANE WARNER perceived directly her husband returned that something had gone wrong. She guessed, from the violence with which he rung the bell, and the impatience he evinced at any delay, that he was out of temper. But *her* spirit, also had been roused from two or three hints that Rosie Ewell had let fall before her, and she determined not to be the first to ask for an explanation.

So the hours slipped away until the eventide, and still Sir Wilfrid had spoken no sentence to her that might not have been addressed to the daughter of his landlady,

But at that time the cottage was unusually still. Sarah had taken the old lady to church, and Mr. Cobble was spending the evening with his friends. There was no one at home but those two fevered hearts, that knew not what to say to one another.

Presently Jane, sitting in her mother's parlour, was startled by a violent ring at the upstairs bell. In another moment she appeared at the door.

"What are you so busy about?" demanded Sir Wilfrid. "Are you going to leave me to spend the whole evening by myself?"

"I supposed that if you wished for my company, Will, you would tell me so," she answered.

"I *do* wish for it, then. I have been very much annoyed this morning, and I want to talk to you about it."

"What has annoyed you?" she asked, seating herself.

"Something that my sister repeated to me. It seems you as good as divulged our secret to her."

"Indeed, I did no such thing."

"You let her guess your feelings, any way. She told me that when she said something to you jestingly, about going as housekeeper to Lambcote Hall, you replied, you would never go to Lambcote as a *housekeeper*."

"That is certainly true—and I never shall."

"Why need you tell a stranger so, though?"

"Because I feel that you are not treating me fairly, Will—that this delay in informing your family and the world that we are married is not like your own generous self. It is unjust to me—more than unjust, it is cruel! You are amusing yourself in society, and passing everywhere as a bachelor, whilst I sit at home day after day brooding over my lot, and wearying for the time when I shall be introduced to your friends as Lady Ewell. But it cannot go on so much longer. It is my *right* to be by your side, and I claim it. If you try to insist on any further delay, I shall tell your mother and sisters myself that we are man and wife."

"My dear child, you are talking the most utter nonsense. No one would believe your story."

"I have my proofs."

"What proofs?"

"My marriage certificate and ring."

"My dear Jane, anyone would think you were simple. Have I not told you that that certificate is of no effect—so much waste-paper."

"But you must make it effectual, Will. You must give me another," she cried passionately. "I *cannot* and I *will not* go on like this any longer. Every time you come down here seems like a sin. I know I *am* your wife, but I do not *feel* like it. Oh, do marry me again—in a few days at furthest—and I will live here as long as ever you choose, and not say a word to anyone."

She had left her seat and knelt down by his side, and laid her dark head upon his knee. But when a man's fickle fancy has wandered from dark to fair, the locks he used to admire become positively repulsive in his eyes. And just at that moment Sir Wilfrid wondered how he ever could have thought Jane Warner handsome. As he wondered, he slightly shifted his knee, and the poor girl knew that she had annoyed instead of softening him.

"Have you lost all feeling for me? Is it of no use my appealing to you?" she said reproachfully, as she raised her head and looked him in the face.

Sir Wilfrid coloured and glanced another way.

"It is folly talking about appeal, Jane," he answered; "as if it was in my power to alter things! We are *not* married—I have told you that before—and nothing will ever make us married——"

"Except performing the ceremony over again," she interposed.

"And that is not convenient for me to do—at least at present."

"Will, do you *ever* mean to do it?" she asked him.

"Whilst you behave in this way you certainly make the prospect less agreeable."

"I will *not* be put off with a subterfuge," she answered vehemently, as she rose to her feet. "For my mother's sake—for my own—I demand that you shall do what is right."

"What has your mother to do with it, when she knows nothing of the matter? It simply concerns you and me. Now do try and be reasonable."

"You always tell me to be reasonable."

"And you never are. Why don't you take my advice. The case is plainly this: you and I entered into a contract by which we thought we were married, but we were mistaken. Two years have gone by, and no one is the wiser, and no one is the worse. We have had a very pleasant time of it, and we shall be friends, I hope, to our lives' end. What's the good of making such a fuss about it?"

She pushed her hair off her face and gazed at him earnestly.

"What do you mean?" she asked wildly. "Tell me plainly what you mean."

"If you promise not to make a noise and disturb the neighbourhood, I will. Plainly, I mean this: that my family have stated so frankly what they expect from me in the way of marriage, that I am afraid to tell them we contemplate it."

"What do they expect?"

"High birth, in the first place, and money in the second. Seven thousand a year is not sufficient to keep up an estate like Lambscote Hall properly, and my people think that my wife should be able, not only to take her place in Society, but contribute something towards the support of her position."

"But it is impossible! You know that I have no money."

"Just so. And that it is partly what makes our marriage so unadvisable. Now, try and listen to me quietly, Jane. Look at the matter from a common-sense point of view, and tell me which would be better—for me to marry you in the face of the objections which my family and Society are sure to raise, and to lose my status in the world by my folly—perhaps blight the whole of your future life with my own—or

for us to agree amicably to let this business be as if it had never been?"

"You want to get rid of me!" she said breathlessly.

"On the contrary, I hope we shall continue the closest of friends to our lives' end. And no one will be the wiser, you see. Not a soul knows we ever meant to be married, except Parfitt, and he has probably forgotten your name by this time. If it had been made public it would be different. But we are actually free to do as we like. And, after a while, you will doubtless marry also, and be much happier in a quieter position of life than you ever could be with me. Indeed (if you will only believe me), I am thinking of you as much as of myself, Jane. You would never be happy at Lambcote. You have told me often, you know, that you will never part with your mother, and I could not have your mother there. It would be too ridiculous. We should be the laughing-stock of the county. And so, if you will agree to it, we will part to-night the very best of friends, but leave off thinking of each other as lovers. What do you say? Is it a bargain?"

She had listened so quietly to his harangue that Sir Wilfrid thought she was digesting every word, and perhaps agreeing to it. And he was quite unprepared to hear her make the room ring with the vehemence of her reply.

"*Never*, Will! I will *never* give my consent to anything so wicked! You may be faithless, and ungenerous, and false to me—God forgive you for it!—but I will never help you to the consummation of a crime. We are married—you know that you said so yourself—that in the sight of Heaven we are man and wife—and if you deny it and leave me (as you threaten to do), I shall never consider that you have the right to marry again, or that I can be the wife of any man but yourself. I am sure that your people would say the same. I am sure that, were I to go to them, and tell them that for two years we have lived together as husband and wife, they would agree with me that we are bound to each other, and that you can never marry another woman."

"They would say no such thing! They *could* not say it, since the tie is not a legal one. They would be very much shocked to hear that we have been living together for so long; and my mother, who holds very strict ideas of propriety, would probably think you a very improper person, and decline to discuss the subject with you. And who would you hurt

most by making the affair public, Jane? Yourself. You would ruin your own character, and benefit no one else. I don't think you would find that a paying game."

"Oh! is there no justice in the world?" cried the poor girl with her face in her hands. "Oh, Will! You *cannot* be so cruel as to forsake me now! Think of how long I have believed myself to be your wife! Have I lost all the love you once had for me?"

"Not at all! That is where you make such a mistake, Jane. I care for you as much as ever I did. But this is strictly a matter of policy. It would ruin me in Society to acknowledge you as my wife, and—and—in fact, *it cannot be.*"

"You have fixed your fancy on some one else! You are in love with another woman!" exclaimed Jane, with the quick intuition of her sex.

Sir Wilfrid thought it might be the best plan to let her know the worst at once.

"You are right," he answered, with affected ease. "*I have* fixed upon my future wife; in fact, I am engaged to her."

"You shall never *marry* her!" cried poor Jane passionately. "I will come between you at the very altar! Everyone in church shall know how you have treated me, and that I am your wife, and you cannot marry anyone else."

"I hardly think that, upon consideration, you would expose yourself to ridicule like that," replied Sir Wilfrid. "A mad-woman forcing herself upon a wedding-party in church and claiming the bridegroom as her property, is not an unusual sight in this country, but it is not a *rôle* that obtains much sympathy. I think it would be better to let things slide. If you only keep your own counsel, not a soul need ever hear of it again."

"My heart—my heart!" cried Jane Warner, pressing her hands against her side. But she did not weep. And the man was touched at last by her tearless pain. He walked up to her and put his arm about her waist.

"It need make no difference to us," he whispered, "or to our affection, Jane. If you like to consider yourself my property, do so. I shall never think of you as less—and would like to think so to our lives' end."

But she threw him off as if he had been a coiling serpent, ready to sting her.

"*Your property!*" she echoed, scornfully. "*Your mistress,*

you mean ! Why can't you call things by their right names ? And having been false to me, you would now be false to her ! No, no ! if you go, you go ; and I will see no more of you. I will never be your friend, nor your mistress. I will be your *wife*—as I believe myself to be at the present moment—and nothing less. But that you can consent to give me up for ever ! Oh, my heart ! my heart !”

“ Of course, if you are obstinate, I can do no more,” replied Sir Wilfrid sulkily. “ It is not my fault if you take the business in such a confoundedly unpleasant spirit. And so, perhaps, I had better say good-bye to you !”

“ Good-bye—good-bye for ever !” said Jane Warner, as she clenched her teeth desperately together.

“ What ! Won't you kiss me ? Are we to part like two strangers ?” said Sir Wilfrid.

She turned and looked at him—such a look as two friends condemned to die, might turn on one another for the last time—a look in which all the pent-up joy and pain of years seemed to be commingled—and then she left him, and Sir Wilfrid heard her go into her own bedroom and turn the key in the lock. So, after several appeals to the broken-hearted girl to come out and make it up again before he went, Sir Wilfrid, with a muttered oath against her obstinacy, flung himself downstairs, and turned his back on the cottage at Chelsea.



CHAPTER XIII.

CONVINCED.

WHEN Jane Warner retired to her own room and locked the door upon her lover, it was with no wish that he should try to follow or entreat her to return. She was glad when she heard the slam of the hall door that announced his departure. She did not wish to speak to him again. She was too angry to trust herself to do it. She did not fling herself upon the bed, nor weep, nor rock to and fro, nor indulge in any of the vagaries which would have come as second nature to a more emotional woman. She only sat down by the open window, which looked out upon the garden, and squeezed her burning head between her two hands, and tried to think.

What should she do. What could she do? In after days the keenest pain she felt in recalling this occasion was the knowledge how feebly Wilfrid must have loved her to subject her to such an insult. But at the time itself the feeling uppermost in her bosom was anger, and a desire for revenge; a great longing to *force* him to hold to his plighted word, and acknowledge her as his wife. Who would help her? To whom could she turn? Jane knew nothing of law or lawyers. Most happily for her they had not, as yet, obtruded themselves upon her peace of mind. And then she perfectly understood what the man whom she had believed to be her husband told her—that the marriage was illegal. So that lawyers' counsel would hinder instead of helping her. Should she appeal, as she had threatened, to his mother, and expose his treachery to his nearest relations? That would hurt him in their estimation, but would it benefit her.

His mother could not compel him to re-marry her against his own will, and how would the confession affect her character? Had not Sir Wilfrid told her. She was his wife—in name only; a woman who had lost her reputation—not in reality, but before the world—the victim of a fraud! Something to be pitied or laughed at, but nothing with right upon her side.

And supposing the entreaties or reproaches of his family

shamed Wilfrid into acting honourably, how would she fare then?

He had threatened to separate her from her poor feeble mother, who almost depended on her solicitude and care. And if she gained her cause, she might have to go to Lambscote alone, and leave Mrs. Warner to look after herself. Would that increase her happiness? Could she live, even contentedly, apart from the poor creature who had been cast, as it were, on her for protection? And then arose the other side of the question. No one but herself and Wilfrid knew of this dishonour. If she could gain no good by making it public, at all events she could save herself from shame by keeping it secret. For the sake of her mother and dead father's name, was it not her duty to preserve her character from open stain?

If Wilfrid chose to commit the crime of marrying again, it could not add to her degradation. She felt that under any circumstances she was bound to him. She was his wife, and whilst he lived she could never be that of another man. But she did not see, on consideration, how she could better her own position by proclaiming his infamy to the world. And, after all, he may have been trying how far he could with her. She hardly thought he could really be engaged—it was too soon for that. He had said so just to show her how wide a gulf was opening between them. And if she was patient and uncomplaining, if she went about her duty and made no sign, perhaps he would relent. She knew she was not fit to be the mistress of Lambscote Hall, but surely—surely he could not, all at once, forget the love-passages that had passed between them.

As Jane thought thus, a vision seems to rise before her of stolen interviews and kisses, of rambles in the moonlit garden, of secret notes, of all the many innocent excitements which a pair of married lovers may be expected to indulge in.

Could Will forget all her love for him—all his expressed love for her? The question comforted her. Nature herself seemed to cry out it was impossible. He had been misled by worldly and false advisers. When he came to think over the matter quietly, his better nature would assert itself, and he would repent of the hasty terms he had used to her, and ask her to forgive them. Had he not repented even before they

separated? Had he not tried to embrace her?—and she had repulsed, and thrown him off! No, no! it was bad enough to talk of such a thing, but Will could never carry it into execution. His whole nature must change before he could be such a coward as to desert her.

Jane was roused at this stage of her reverie by the sound of her mother's voice in the hall. She staggered as she rose to her feet. She had been sitting at the window in the same position for nearly an hour, and felt as if she had been recalled from some ideal world to the necessities of the present. But she forced herself to be reasonable and go downstairs, where she found Mrs. Warner more querulous than usual. She was loud in complaint of Sarah, who had presumed to object to her conduct in church, and Sarah was loud in complaint of that conduct, which appeared to have attracted the attention of the entire congregation.

"I shall speak to the lieutenant about you as soon as ever he returns home, and you will receive a month's warning," said the old lady indignantly. "The idea of an ignorant creature like you dictating what I shall, or shall not do, in church."

Sarah was used to attacks of this sort, and took no notice of them.

"If you'll believe me, miss," she said, addressing Jane, "the whole church was staring at her. First, she took off one thing, and then another, until I really thought she'd have undressed herself altogether. The trouble I've had you'd never believe. I'd have brought her home at once, only she wouldn't stir. As for her bonnet and cap, she kept them in her lap the whole time. And a thorough draught blowing through the building, too. So don't blame me, miss, if she's caught her death of cold."

"Oh, mother! mother! that was very naughty of you," exclaimed Jane, in the tone of reproof she would have used to a child. "How could you do such a thing? You know you must not take off your bonnet when you are out of doors."

"But it was so hot, Jane. The water stood on my face," pleaded Mrs. Warner deprecatingly.

"All the more reason you should have been careful, dear. Now you will catch cold perhaps, and have the toothache, and you know you don't like that."

"Why did you not take me to church yourself, Jane? I never do such things when you are there," replied her mother penitently.

"I wish I *had* taken you," responded the daughter with a sigh. "But never mind now, dear! Don't worry about it any more. Only you must be good another time, and do as Sarah tells you."

"It's quite true what she says, miss," remarked Sarah confidentially; "she's never up to them tricks when *you* are with her. But Lor'! the trouble she gives directly your back's turned, you'll never know. I am always in a fidget lest I should find her with her head in the copper, or her heels out of the waterbutt. She'd do herself a mischief, as sure as eggs is eggs, if she hadn't you to look after her."

The little old lady, who had been listening attentively to what the servant said, here plucked her daughter by the sleeve.

"But you won't leave me Jane?" she whispered; "you will promise not to leave me till your dear father comes home, and I'll do anything you wish."

"I will *never* leave you," replied Jane, as she kissed the poor perplexed face and made it smile again.

It is seldom that we are left to bear the heaviest trials of our lives alone. Other troubles crop up—minor ones, it is true—but quite sufficient to keep our minds from continually dwelling on that which would break our hearts. So it was with Jane Warner. Her mother's little eccentricity of sitting in a strong draught without cap or bonnet resulted in an attack of rheumatism in the head, which confined the invalid to her bedroom for some weeks, during which she would hardly allow her daughter to stir from her side. And Jane was indefatigable in her attendance on her—so indefatigable indeed, that the apothecary who visited Mrs. Warner advised her to allow herself a little more air and exercise.

"Your mother is in no danger whatever. Her complaint is very painful, and takes time to cure, but you must not sacrifice your health on that account. You are looking far from well, Miss Warner—very far from well. In fact, I don't like your looks at all. Will you allow me to ask you a few questions?"

Jane reddened painfully, and looked as frightened as a hare. She knew that she was not well. The week she had

spent by her mother's bedside, and during which she had received neither word nor sign from Wilfrid Ewell, had convinced her of the fact, but she had no wish to go under the doctor's hands. Her disease was far beyond his simple cures. So she affected to be as well as usual.

"Indeed you are mistaken, Mr. Willett. I am accustomed to take a great deal of exercise, and the atmosphere of a sick-room gives me a headache. That is all. I will take a long walk this evening when mother is asleep, and shake it off."

"I don't think that is all, Miss Warner. However, I suppose you must have your own way. Please to take daily exercise in future though, or we shall have you laid up as well."

She was glad of the advice, which forced her to follow her own inclinations, for her heart was breaking for news of Wilfrid. Those weeks of solitude and reflection had taught her that she must see him: that it was her duty to see him, and make another appeal to his manliness and sense of honour. Perhaps he imagined, from her silence, that she acquiesced in his decision—that she, too, thought it the best thing that they should agree to part; that she had determined, on reflection, to follow his counsel, and look out for a lowlier and more suitable settlement in life. And he must be undeceived at once. He must know her real mind upon the subject. There was a fear in her breast now, which had never been there before, and it behoved him to share her trouble, and to do his best to avert it. She had half-decided to write to him, when the doctor's advice made her resolve to see him instead. He had forbidden her calling at his chambers, but this was an occasion which admitted of no precedent. So, the next day, leaving her mother in her arm-chair, with her head well wrapped up in flannels (which it took all Sarah's time to prevent her taking off again, under the idea that they were unbecoming and the lieutenant would object to her appearance), Jane crept out of the house and took her way towards the Strand. It was still very warm, but the season was over, and the streets were thinning visibly. Country clergymen alone, with their wives and daughters, and seaside residents who had let their houses for the season, blocked up the pavements as they read the play-bills and inspected the public buildings. How easy it is to

detect the man or woman who is not used to London life ! How curiously they twist themselves about when uncertain in which direction they should proceed, and what a time they stand at the crossings, whilst cabs and omnibuses pass them in one continuous stream, and the golden opportunity never seems to arrive to their bewildered eyes. Ah ! in crossings, as in life, we must make our golden opportunities for ourselves. The man who deliberates at one or the other is lost.

But Jane saw nothing of all this, as she walked rapidly with downcast eyes along the pavement. *She* didn't hesitate at the crossings. She hardly looked to see if they were crossable, but plunged deliberately amongst the vehicles to gain the other side. All she wanted was to reach the Adelphi—to hear what Wilfrid would have to say to her now.

She had cast all her hopes upon this die. It was her last throw, and if it failed, all was lost. She had reached Charing Cross, and her heart had begun to beat faster with the knowledge of his proximity, when some one pronounced her name, and, looking round, she saw Rosie Ewell standing at the door of Waterloo House.

"Miss Warner ! Is that really you ?" she exclaimed. "I thought I recognised your face, but you were holding your head so low I could hardly see. How are you ? How is your mother ? Do you know, I wanted mamma to take me to Chelsea to see you this afternoon, only she is so dreadfully busy about our autumn things."

Jane was fain to stop, for the girl had come out upon the pavement and taken her by the hand.

"Is your mamma with you ?" she asked timidly.

"Yes ; she's in that shop, buying flannels and velveteens, for Wilfrid's been so good. He's given us all our autumn outfits. But how pale you are, Miss Warner. Have you been ill ?"

"My mother has, Miss Ewell. She has had rheumatism in the head for three weeks past, and I have been in close attendance on her. That is enough to make one pale."

"You *do* look ill," continued Rosie sympathetically. "I told Wilfrid I was sure there must be something the matter, or you would certainly have been with us yesterday. It was such a lovely sight."

"Is Sir Wilfrid at his chambers. then, Miss Ewell ?"

"Oh dear no—of course not! He's in Paris, I suppose, or he ought to be, by this time!"

"In Paris?—left London?" she faltered.

"Well, naturally so. Don't people always go away for their honeymoon? It's their only jolly time, you know. But I wish you had been at the church, Miss Warner! I wonder Wilfrid did not send you an invitation. They say it was the prettiest wedding of the season. And Miss St. Blase looked beautiful. You know she is very handsome, and her wedding-dress made her look like a queen. And my sisters and I were all bridesmaids. Oh! such lovely dresses—Eau de Nil with lilies of the valley. They are Wilfrid's favourite flowers. And our bouquets were all lilies of the valley, too. And he gave us such lovely bracelets, with 'Lena' on them in enamel—look! here is mine!" concluded Rosie, thrusting out her wrist for Jane's inspection.

The trinket swam in a mist before her eyes.

"Do—you—mean——" she said very slowly, "that Sir Wilfrid—was—*married* yesterday?"

"Yes; to Miss St. Blase. I made sure you would have heard of it, but I suppose it won't be in the papers till to-morrow. Oh! it is a shame you weren't there! Hark! there's mamma calling me—will you come in and see her?"

"No!—no!" stammered Jane; "I have—no time—good morning!" and she turned blindly on her way again.

"Good-bye!" called out Rosie; "and I'll come and see you some day soon, if mamma will let me, and tell you all about it. Good-bye!" and with a farewell nod she re-entered Waterloo House.

Jane staggered for a few steps along the sunny pavement, trying hard to keep upright and walk steadily.

Some of the bystanders laughed to see her efforts. They had often watched such solemn endeavours on the part of their fellow-creatures before, and fully believed they would end in the arms of the next policeman. But suddenly there was a feeble movement of her hands forward—a faint cry—and Jane lay senseless on the pavement.

Plenty rushed to her assistance then. There was a crowd round her in a minute. "It's a sunstroke!" said one. "A fit!" cried another. "I believe she's dead!" ejaculated a third. But a policeman, putting them aside, lifted and carried the unconscious girl into a chemist's shop, where in a

few minutes she came to life again, and stared vacantly at those surrounding her.

"It is nothing! Let me go!" were her first words.

"You'd better have a cab, miss. You're not fit to stand," said the policeman. "Where's your home?"

"*Home!* I have no home!" she cried hysterically; and then, controlling herself, she added: "Oh yes! yes! what am I saying? I had forgotten! Please to call me a cab, policeman, and tell him to drive me to Wolsey Cottage, Chelsea."

What she suffered during that drive was best known to herself and Heaven. But when she reached her mother's side, Jane Warner was, to all outward appearances, herself again.



CHAPTER XIV.

MARRIED.

SIR WILFRID EWELL had obtained his soul's desire. The fruit which seemed to hang so far above his reach was in his hands—between his teeth. Did the realization of his hopes fulfil the anticipation that preceded it? Does the realization of *any* of our hopes afford us complete satisfaction after the first few days? There is an old French story to the effect that a certain man loved a certain woman so madly and blindly, that the thought of her came between him and everything that he attempted, and rendered him unfit for his daily work. The alliance was an unsuitable one—indeed, he did not wish to marry at all—but at last he felt compelled to do so against his better judgment, and the reason he gave to an intimate friend for his apparent folly was this :

"My dear So-and-So," he said, "I am obliged to marry in order to live. The charms of this woman so interfere with every effort I would make that they paralyse my energies. At all risks I must be cured, and I know of but one cure for such a disease. That is marriage. I marry her to cure myself of loving her." And the end of the story is that he was cured in fourteen days.

Sir Wilfrid's love for Lena St. Blase was just such another mad, unreasoning passion as that of the French philosopher. He had pursued it in a delirious frenzy that had rendered him oblivious of every obstacle that stood in his way, and careless of what sacred obligation he trampled on in his eagerness to reach the goal. And now the winning-post was passed, the race was won, and for a few days he was feverishly triumphant, and forgot everything and everybody except Lena. The world envied him : his bride was beautiful, and he was madly in love with her. What wonder if he thought that he had gained a life-long happiness?

But "these violent delights have violent ends," and the first cool breath that blew upon Sir Wilfrid's ardour was the discovery that his wife did not care one tithe for him in proportion to the affection he lavished upon her.

It has been said before that Lady Ewell was utterly heartless, and she was not clever enough to conceal the fact for long. It is a very different thing to sit on a pedestal and be worshipped as a goddess from being called upon every moment of the day to render the consideration expected from a wife. In the former position her coldness passed for shyness, her selfishness for timidity, her indifference for maidenly shame. But now all things were changed. Reserve and bashfulness were supposed to be of the past, and her husband expected to receive her confidence and confessions of attachment instead.

"Blessed are they who expect nothing, for they shall not be disappointed." This certainly would have been the wisest creed for Sir Wilfrid to adopt, for he had not been married many weeks before he found that to be allowed to make love to his wife was a concession, and to expect her to make love to him in return was a folly.

The marble cheek of Galatea, before she was endowed with life, was not colder to the impassioned kiss of Pygmalion than Lady Ewell's to those of her enamoured husband. And after a very little while he discovered that if she suffered his caresses without complaining he had reason to be thankful. She made him understand at an early period of their union that she didn't like kissing and all that sort of nonsense. It was all very well for school-girls and dairy-maids, she said, but she considered it quite beneath the practice of men and women of the world. It was childish, vulgar, coarse; indeed, all manifestations of love were *coarse* in Lady Ewell's opinion, and the less husbands and wives indulged in them the better. She could not see why two people should not go through the world together, perfectly good friends and all that, but without any of these vulgar displays of affection which were quite unnecessary to the existence of the tender passion.

"Love," Lady Ewell used to assert, "was something far beyond all that sort of thing," a sentiment which Sir Wilfrid could not deny, although somehow it struck a chill to his heart.

His wife, however, appeared quite ready to accept any proofs of his devotion to her so long as she was not called upon to return them by the ordinary expressions of gratitude. She was most beautifully and intensely selfish, and whilst

her husband waited upon her and consulted her every wish, and mapped out the day's amusement without any reference to his own, Lady Ewell was pleased to be gracious, and accept the good things offered to her, and consider them amply paid for by a smile.

In this way her infatuated bridegroom took her over to Spain, and basked in the sunshine of Madrid and Andalusia and Castile, if not in the sunshine of his wife's affection. Her beauty had not yet palled upon him, or perhaps it would be more correct to say that her evil temper had not yet shown itself to the extent of overshadowing her beauty and rendering it worthless. And yet there was a slight difference between them, even in the honeymoon, and that difference arose on account of Captain Dorsay.

Sir Wilfrid had been recalling, after the fatuous fashion of men in love, the days of his courtship, and in mentioning the river-party, happened to say how miserable he had been made on that occasion by the looks of Captain Dorsay.

"I didn't like the fellow from the beginning," he continued. "He looks like a cad, and he has a most offensive manner. But when I saw his insolent eyes turned upon you in that way, my darling, I could have knocked him down."

"Good gracious me, Wilfrid! in *what* way?" asked Lady Ewell, pettishly.

"Why, as if he was in love with you, Lena. I consider his way of gazing at you was most impertinent. I don't suppose he would presume to do it again—in fact I don't suppose we are likely to meet him again; but if we were——"

"*Not likely to meet him again*, Wilfrid, when he is one of my oldest friends? What do you mean?"

"But I thought you told me he had proposed to you, and you had refused him?"

"Does that fact militate against friendship?"

"Generally it does. It is usual in such cases to break off an acquaintanceship altogether."

"Well, mamma didn't see fit to do so, and I think she would be very much astonished if I did. But I have no intention of doing it. Poor old Jack would break his heart if he were refused the *entrée* to our house."

"Have you known him long?"

"Years and years. He knew me as a little child. He is nearly double my age."

"And yet he wished to marry you?"

"Does that seem so extraordinary in your eyes, Wilfrid?"

"No, no, my dearest. But fancy the man's presumption in thinking you were likely to accept his advances. And he does not bear the best of characters, either."

"Who told you so?" asked Lady Ewell quickly.

"I have heard it at the clubs. Nothing very bad, I mean, but he is considered a loose fish. There are several nasty stories afloat about him, concerning cards, and other things."

"What ill-natured creatures you men are, always trying to do each other an ill turn!" cried Lena petulantly. "However, no one shall set me against Captain Dorsay, nor prevent my calling him my friend."

"Of course not, my darling, if you wish it, though I had no idea your mother was so intimate with him. But don't say *too* much about it, Lena, or I shall get jealous."

"It would be utterly absurd if you did, considering I have told you I refused him."

"Why did you refuse him?"

"Well, he has no money, in the first place;" but here Lady Ewell stopped short, as if she had committed herself.

"Was that the *only* objection?" said Sir Wilfrid drily.

"Of course not. Now, don't look so cross about it, Wilfrid, or I shan't go on. There were a thousand reasons why I could not marry the man."

"I only want to hear *one*—that you did not love him, Lena."

"If I had loved him, do you suppose I should have married you, you silly goose? No! mamma would not hear of it—and neither would I. But, at the same time, I know she would be extremely vexed if there was anything like a coolness between us; and I know Jack is looking forward with so much pleasure to visiting us at Lambscote. He told me so the last time we met, and he likes you so much, too, Wilfrid, that I am quite determined you shall be the best of friends."

"I am willing, dear, though I must say I wish Captain

Dorsay did not bear *quite* so indifferent a character. But—
but—have you always called him ‘Jack?’ ”

“*Always!*” she replied confidently; “ever since I can remember. I couldn’t call him by any other name to save my life.”

“I think I heard you address him as ‘Captain Dorsay’ that day upon the steam launch.”

“Perhaps I did—in public.”

“Then I hope you will always try and fancy that you are in public with him, for I don’t like the idea of your calling any man but myself by his Christian name.”

“Oh, Wilfrid! What an absurdly prudish request. I really cannot accede to it. Why, my friends wouldn’t know me again if I launched out into the ‘extremely proper.’ ”

“I am sorry to hear that.”

“Besides,” she went on haughtily, “I don’t think you are a proper judge of the case. Mamma would never have allowed me to do anything unbecoming my station in life. And *we*, who are ‘born to the purple,’ Wilfrid, can do a great many things that would be startling, perhaps, in parvenues.”

He bit his lips and was silent. He did not like her allusion to parvenues.

“I fancy you may trust me,” continued Lady Ewell more gently, “to take good care of my name and myself. It is not likely that any action of mine will be misconstrued in Society. My family has held its own too long there. And as for Jack, he is a most intimate crony of my dear grandfather, the Duke of Martyrdom.”

“I dare say he is. It little signifies with whom men associate.”

“But we should have to meet him when we visit grandpapa. By-the-way, I had a letter from that old duck this morning, and he says he shan’t ask us to the Castle just yet, but we must be sure and spend Christmas there.”

“I was in hopes you would have asked my mother and sisters to spend Christmas at Lambcote, Lena.”

“Oh, not our *first* Christmas, Wilfrid. They must wait till next. Grandpapa will never forgive us if we refuse him. And you will find yourself launched into a proper set at Castle Blase.”

"Including Captain Dorsay?" said Sir Wilfrid sarcastically. "Well, you must ask the Duke to enrol Rosie in his invitation, then, for she will be with us at Christmas, and we cannot leave her behind."

"*That child!* My dear Wilfrid, you surely don't expect to drag her about with us wherever we go? What *would* she do at the Castle? She would be entirely out of place. It would be the silliest thing in the world to take her."

"But who can she stay with? There will be no one but servants left at Lambescote."

"Can't she go home to her mother's during our absence?"

"Hardly, dear. I have promised my mother to take the entire charge of Rosie henceforth, and I should not like to send her back so soon."

"I am sure I don't see the way to help you, Wilfrid. I have always thought the proposed adoption of your sister the most foolish plan in the world. But you didn't consult me."

"I thought there was no need. Rosie is the dearest girl possible, and will make you a charming companion."

"A companion for *me*?" replied Lady Ewell, shrugging her shoulders. "My dear Wilfrid, you must be crazy."

"Why so?"

"Do you seriously think *I* could make a companion of a child like that? Her proper place is at school; and I really think if you have positively taken the burden of her support upon yourself, that you ought to send her there, at all events for the next few years."

"Send Rosie to school!" repeated Wilfrid, with knitted brows. "But she is quite a young woman—sixteen next birthday. She would never consent to it. It would make her very unhappy. She has been looking forward to this time as to her emancipation from childhood—her entrance to Society. She is my favourite sister, as I have told you before, Lena, and I have been looking forward to having her to live with me, with almost as much pleasure as herself."

Lady Ewell shrugged her shoulders again in a most expressive manner,

"I don't wish to interfere with any of your plans, Wilfrid—for your sister or yourself. Only you mustn't expect me to take part in them. Rosie is not *my* sister, remember. I

suppose if she cannot possibly be left alone at Lambcote at Christmas, *you* must stay with her. It will not be very pleasant for me to visit grandpa alone, but I should not dream of opposing you. So set your mind quite at rest upon that matter."

"You are very good, dear," said Sir Wilfrid dubiously ; "but I daresay we shall think of some other plan before the time comes. Don't talk of it any more now, Lena. I have but one wish during this blessed time—to make you happy, and to be happy myself. So come, and let us take a drive along the Corso."



CHAPTER XV.

LAMBSCOTE.

LAMBSCOTE was looking its very best when the newly married couple returned to England to take possession of it the following October. And Sir Wilfrid felt as if the world were at his feet, as he watched the enthusiasm with which his beautiful wife was hailed as mistress of the hall, and the courteous ease with which she received her new acquaintances and their congratulations. Strange to say, he had almost forgotten the conversation which had taken place between them respecting Rosie, or only remembered it to think that the heat or some other trivial cause had upset Lena on that occasion, and that when she came to know his sister, she would love her as much as he did.

Stranger still, Sir Wilfrid seldom thought of Jane Warner, or rather, he forbid himself to think of her. Since regret for her affection or for her sorrow implied a reproach for his cowardly desertion, he tried to convince himself that his connection with her had been sin—an outcome of filial disobedience and deceit—something which it were best to think of as little as possible. How easy it is for men to persuade themselves that what they like is the right thing to do, and that what is disagreeable to their feelings, or antagonistic to their advancement, is wrong!

The thought of Jane Warner *would* rise sometimes like an unquiet ghost upon his memory, and at the most awkward moments—contrasting, perhaps, with his wife's coldness and reserve, recalled by some trifling office which he was compelled to do for himself. But he always shook it off, as we shake off the remembrance of a committed injury or a received insult, and drank the more wine, or made the fiercer love to Lena, in order to rid himself of a memory which was so unpleasant and so wrong.

Lady Otto St. Blase was waiting to receive her daughter at Lambscote Hall. Sir Wilfrid would rather it had not been so, but there is no forbidding the entry of one's house to the mother of an only child. And since her daughter had been

irrevocably taken off her hands, and all her designs for her and anxieties respecting her were at an end, Lady Otto had become pertinaciously affectionate. There never had been so filial a child as Lena before; there never had been so devoted a mother as herself; there never had been two people with so completely one mind, one thought, and one wish, as she and her precious girl. The loss she had sustained in Lena's marriage was of course irremediable, and she would not have foregone the happiness of welcoming her back to England for all the world.

And Lady Otto's assertions were not all false. She *was* excessively pleased with her daughter's touching obedience in marrying Sir Wilfrid Ewell and Lambscote, and desirous to show her sense of it by withdrawing all advice (or even the semblance of control) for the future.

When darling Lena was under *her* guardianship, of course it was only right and proper that she should caution her with regard to her actions or her acquaintances, but now that she was Lady Ewell, she had nothing more to do with her in that way.

Her husband was the right person to control her, and he would be the only one to blame if she went wrong. All that Lady Otto had to do was to congratulate her dear child on her success, and make every use of her she could, and these things she did to perfection. She had installed herself at Lambscote Hall for a week before Sir Wilfrid and Lady Ewell arrived, and was full of praises to her daughter of everything she had seen in the establishment.

"Perfect taste, my dear," she said in the confidence of the dressing-room, "and lavish expenditure. Of course I was quite unable to look into the working details in poor dear Sir Robert's time, but nothing is spared, I can assure you, either in kitchen or stable. You have found a jewel, my dear—a perfect jewel."

"I dare say," replied Lady Ewell, yawning; "and, at all events, as you say, the *setting* is good. But have you heard anything, mamma, about Rose Ewell coming to live with us here?"

"Mrs. Goodman, the housekeeper, told me that she was preparing the chintz-room for one of the Miss Ewells—but she didn't say which. What of it?"

"What of it, mamma? Why, do you suppose I am going

to have a gawky schoolgirl tacked on to my skirts morning, noon, and night? I don't like the idea of her living here at all, and so I told Wilfrid some time ago."

"Oh dear! Oh dear! I hope you are not going to quarrel already, Lena. Nothing is such bad form as married people squabbling over a trifle. But you never *did* know how to manage men, my dear. You should always let them have their own way—so long as it does not interfere with yours."

"But the question is, will it *not* interfere with mine? Sir Wilfrid talked of taking his sister to Castle Blase this Christmas, but you know that's impossible. Grandpapa would not stand it. He hates children. And, as a pleasant alternative, I suppose we shall have to stay at home."

"Christmas is a long time to come," said Lady Otto reflectively, "and if you only go to work the proper way, you'll coax him round to your own ideas before it arrives. But why should you oppose his sister coming here? It is most impolitic. Which of them is it?"

"The youngest, Rosie—the one like him."

"I remember her at the wedding—a very nice-looking girl. What objection have you to her?"

"None, personally; but Wilfrid has promised Mrs. Ewell that he will keep her till she is married, or some absurd offer of that sort, and I think she will be a great nuisance. I hate to have a spy upon all my actions—never to feel free, or my own mistress."

"That's folly, Lena. You will always be your own mistress wherever you are, or whoever you live with. You are too headstrong to be ever led by anyone. And if you oppose Sir Wilfrid with regard to his relations, he may oppose you with regard to yours, and bar the door against *me*; and you know I shall never be a spy upon you. Come, dear, promise me you will not say another word against Miss Ewell coming to Lambscote Hall."

"Will you promise me something in return?"

"Certainly! if it is in my power to do it."

"Will you promise not to say anything to Sir Wilfrid against Captain Dorsay?"

Lady Otto started.

"I hope you are not going to keep up that acquaintance, Lena."

"I am, most certainly. Did you expect me to cut all my old friends directly I was married?"

"Of course not. Only I should have thought you would have been glad of an excuse to cut Captain Dorsay."

"Mamma! you know you are not speaking the truth. You know that it was for *your* sake alone that I was cool to him for awhile, in order to let others have a chance. You know that it was acting on your advice that I did not marry the poor darling myself. But having done all this, I have not the least intention of our becoming strangers. I have told Wilfrid so, and he permits me to do as I choose. Only, I think it will require your sanction to make things easy. So if I promise to be good, and let this detestable girl run wild over Lambescote, will you, for your part, ask my husband to invite Jack down here for some shooting?"

"But what excuse can I possibly have for making such a request?"

"Say Captain Dorsay is an old friend of the family—you know how often he is at the Castle—and that grandpapa will take it as a personal favour if he is paid the compliment of receiving an invitation. And you shall remain here the whole time to see that he behaves himself?"

"Well, I don't like the task, Lena, and I don't see what good can come of it."

"And I don't see what harm can come of it. I feel I shall be bored to death down here if I cannot have a few congenial souls to keep me company. And really, mamma, you are too hard on poor Jack. It was all very well when he wanted to marry me—or you were afraid I should marry him. But that's all over now, you see, and what on earth is to prevent our being friends?"

"If Sir Wilfrid approves of it, Lena, I have no right to interfere. But why not leave it to his decision? Why make me the go-between?"

"Because I was foolish enough to let him know that Jack liked me, and men are so unreasonably jealous, he can't get the idea out of his head. Disabuse his mind of it, mamma. Tell him it was nothing, won't you? And give him the names of two or three other men, besides Captain Dorsay. I should like your cousin, Major Grantham, to come, and Egbert and Dan St. Blase, and any other of your friends, dear, whom you would like to ask."

This compliment, accompanied by kisses and sweet looks—rare gifts from Lena—had the desired effect; and after a short conversation with Lady Otto on the subject, invitations were sent out to all the four gentlemen named. But before they made their appearance at Lambscote, Rosie had arrived—Rosie, brimful of chatter and overrunning with happiness at finding herself settled at the Hall. There was fishing in the lake, and learning to ride the chestnut pony her brother had purchased for her, and rearing the sweetest fox-terrier puppy that was ever seen, to engage the girl's attention; and really (as Lady Otto remarked to her daughter) she was no trouble at all, and scarcely visible during the greater part of day.

But of course she was present at their meals, and as they were, as yet, only a family party, Miss Rosie's tongue ran sometimes a little faster than was convenient for some of her hearers. And she was not quick at taking a hint either, for her innocent conscience, which knew no wrong, could not understand the necessity of concealment which forms the creed of too many men and women of the world.

"Wilfrid," she exclaimed one morning at breakfast, "*who* do you think I saw the day after your wedding?"

"My dear child it is impossible to guess! The Dean of Humberdom, perhaps."

"The dean—rubbish! What do you care for the dean? No; it was Jane Warner. Mamma and I were at Waterloo House shopping, and she passed the door."

Sir Wilfrid turned red, and commenced to search for an imaginary table-napkin.

"I saw her, and called her back," continued Rosie, "and told her you were married, and she had never heard it, Wilfrid, and she looked so uncomfortable, poor dear! I am sure she was disappointed because you never asked her to the wedding. Did you send her any wedding-cake?"

"I don't know anything about it," replied her brother confusedly.

"Who is Jane Warner?" demanded Lena.

"Oh, such a nice girl!—the daughter of the people Wilfrid lodged with at Chelsea."

"A lodging-house keeper's daughter!" exclaimed Lady Otto. "My dear Rose, you should not associate with such persons. They are not fit society for you."

"You are quite right, Lady Otto, and I have told my sister so before," said Sir Wilfrid in a tone of annoyance.

Rosie looked up in amazement.

"But, Wilfrid, you took me there to sleep. And they were such good friends to you, and showed you so much attention for so many years. Surely there can be no harm in my speaking to Miss Warner when we meet.

"No, no; of course not; only you are not likely to meet again," replied Wilfrid, irrelevantly; "and, as Lady Otto tells you, people in that station of life are not fit for you to associate with."

"Let me convince her, my dear Sir Wilfrid," interposed his mother-in-law. "My dear child, it was all very well, doubtless, for your *brother* to know these persons and speak to them. Gentlemen *can* do such things, but not ladies. Fancy, if this young woman, presuming on your notice, were to recognise you when you were surrounded perhaps by aristocratic friends! What an awful contingency to contemplate!"

"I shouldn't care," replied Rosie stoutly; "I would shake hands with Jane Warner anywhere. You don't know how nice she is, Lady Otto—such a sweet, sad face! And she *is* a lady, though she lets lodgings. You told me yourself, Wilfrid, that her father was in the Royal Navy."

"Sir Wilfrid appears to be fully acquainted with the family history," remarked Lady Ewell.

"I certainly had been told so far," replied her husband uneasily; "but Rosie's tongue outstrips her memory. The Warners are good, respectable people, and I know no more. We are not likely to see them again, Rosie dear, and so I think we might introduce a more profitable topic of conversation."

But Lady Ewell was not inclined to let this one drop. She was very cunning, and keen-witted, when it served her purpose to be so, and Sir Wilfrid's discomfiture had been too palpable to pass unobserved.

"If they are so good and respectable, I don't see *why* you should never see them again, Wilfrid," she answered, "especially as the young lady appears to have felt the neglect of not being asked to the wedding. Why wasn't she asked? Whose fault was it?"

"My dearest Lena, such questions are too absurd. They

annoy me excessively," exclaimed Sir Wilfrid as he rose and left the room.

"I wonder why he is angry?" said Rosie innocently; "he used to seem so fond of the Warners. He was always praising them, and saying how kind they were to him. And he lived there four years, you know, and Jane cooked and did everything for him all that time. Poor Jane! she *did* look so sad. I think Wilfrid ought to have sent her a present when he was married."

"Perhaps he did," remarked Lady Ewell.

"I think not, Lena, because he seems so cross now whenever I mention her name. I wonder if she has done anything to offend him?"

As soon as she met her brother again, Rosie had reason to believe he was crosser than ever.

"Rosie," he commenced angrily, "once for all, I won't have Miss Warner's name mentioned in this house. Do you understand me? And if you disobey my wishes, I shall send you straight home to your mother."

The tone of voice was so authoritative, so unlike any in which Wilfrid had ever spoken to her before, that the girl was frightened and burst into tears.

"Oh, Wilfred! what *has* she done? It must be something very bad to make you speak to me like that?"

"Forgive me if I seem harsh, but in this particular I must be obeyed. It is not necessary to give you my reasons. My orders to you are, not to speak of the Warners or Chelsea again. Things happened there—the thought of the whole business is distasteful to me. Do you understand?"

"Yes, yes, Wilfrid—perfectly, and I will do as you wish. But suppose when I am in London I meet her, what am I to do?"

"Don't ask me! I neither know nor care. But don't mention the subject at Lambscote again, that's all."

He strode away, uneasy and discontented, leaving Rosie more uneasy still. What was she to think of such extraordinary conduct? What on earth could have happened to make him turn against dear good Jane Warner and her poor old mother?

Lady Ewell and Lady Otto St. Blase were not so mystified upon the subject. They talked it over together, and came to the conclusion that most women of the world would have

done. Lady Otto laughed at the *contretemps* brought about by the sister's innocence and the brother's indiscretion ; and Lady Ewell laughed too, as at an excellent jest, though she stored the supposed discovery up for future use all the same. And a few days after when Sir Wilfrid, in commenting on the fact that Captain Dorsay had accepted his invitation to Lambcote, remarked peevishly that he would like to be sure of the fellow's meaning in coming to stay with them, his wife turned round and answered quietly :

" Yes, and I should like to be sure of *your* meaning in refusing to let your sister discuss the sayings and doings of Jane Warner."

From which moment Sir Wilfrid Ewell never again objected to any visitors whom his wife, or his wife's mother, thought fit to ask to Lambcote.



CHAPTER XVI.

DESERTED.

No one who had seen Jane Warner after her interview with Rosie Ewell would have supposed that she had received a shock that she would feel till the last day of her life. She could not find relief in the emotion ordinarily displayed by her sex, and had she been able to do so, she would have despised herself for the weakness. The wound was too deep for that. The knife had cut too sharply. Tears could not heal it, nor moans revive the dead affection in her lover's breast. He had deserted her—coldly and deliberately deserted her. It was done and over—nothing could avert the evil, and all she had to do was to keep the secret in her own breast. As the cab conveyed her back to Chelsea, she had but one object in view—to prevent her sick mother guessing that she had been ill, or received bad news. With this intent she braced herself together, as it were, holding her grief in check until she had leisure and liberty to look it boldly in the face. She excused her unusual extravagance of driving home on the plea of the excessive heat, and took her place by her mother's side for the remainder of the evening with a self-command that was marvellous in one so young. But Jane had been reared in the school of adversity, and accustomed, from a child, to put aside her own feelings in deference to those of others. She was a true woman, with all a woman's deep capacity for suffering, and all a woman's undaunted bravery (begotten of unselfishness and pride) in locking up her pain in her own bosom, until sometimes, like the time-honoured fox, it preys upon her vitals.

The feeble sex have many faults. They are, as a rule, vain, jealous, and deceitful. But give them something to bear—either physically or mentally—and you will bring to the light such powers of endurance as men have no chance to cope with. A man under physical pain is usually a most ludicrous, not to say contemptible, object. Not in the battle-field perhaps, or the hospital ward, where he suffers under the

eyes of his own sex, but at home, on the domestic hearth, where there is no one to be worried but his unfortunate women-kind. A man with the toothache or headache in the bosom of his family is a sight for angels to weep over. But what do women—God help them!—not endure in the course of their man-loving, child-bearing, heart-breaking existence? How much pain do they patiently suffer—how much suspense and anxiety silently go through—how many a mental blow do they receive upon their tender bosoms, and make no sign? If men had to bear half the ills of women, the population would be beneficially decreased. They would sink under them in a quarter of the time.

Jane Warner was not behind the best of her sex in her capacity for bold endurance. Her heart ached in a dull, leaden manner all the evening. It was as much as she possibly could do to prevent the sighs bursting from her overcharged bosom. But she kept them in. She stamped down the longing to weep, the maddening desire to pour her story into the ears of some one, if it were only Sarah, or Miss Prosser. She made Mrs. Warner's tea, and served it, and undressed the old lady, and put her to bed, and read her to sleep, and performed all those little offices which are light when we are happy, but oh! so heavy when our thoughts are elsewhere. At last her duties were completed, and she dragged herself downstairs to speak to Sarah.

"Lor', miss, you *do* look bad! Whatever have you been a-doing to yourself?" was the servant's greeting, as she caught sight of Jane's white face.

"I am not very well, Sarah. The heat was so trying to-day, and I have not been out for so long; I think it has knocked me up. I should like to go to bed. Will you attend to Miss Prosser's supper for me to-night?"

"Of course I will, miss. But why don't you take a turn in the garden first. Maybe the cool air will freshen you a bit."

But Jane's stricken heart turned with loathing from the garden, where she had passed so many happy hours with *him*.

"No, thank you!" she answered, shuddering. "I think that rest is the only thing that will do me good. Thank you for attending to Miss Prosser for me, Sarah; and unless my mother wants me, let me be quiet till to-morrow morning."

She turned away with a sickly smile as she spoke, and

toiled upstairs again, and sat down in her own room alone with her great trouble and tried to think.

She tore off the flimsy covering with which she had temporarily hidden the wound, and brought it to the light, and probed it with an unflinching hand.

What was this burthen she was called upon to bear? A life-long widowhood! Well, since his love had gone—since, perhaps, it had never been—this would not be so hard in time as it looked now. Had Wilfrid loved her as she thought he did, and they had been compelled to part, as her father was torn from her poor mother, then, indeed, her brain might have given way in like measure with thinking on what she had lost. But if a man—so this philosopher argued with her own heart—if a man picked up a sparkling stone in the street, which he thought to be a jewel, and was told afterwards that he had deceived himself, and carried home a crystal or a piece of glass, would it not be unreasonable of him to lament his disappointment in the same measure as if he had owned a diamond and lost it?

Wilfrid had never really loved her—of that she felt convinced. She had taken his fancy, she supposed, or she had ministered to his comfort, or flattered his vanity, that was all. And as soon as he learnt that the law would free him, he took advantage of it to commit a crime (for that this second marriage *was* a crime in God's eyes Jane had no doubt), and cast her off for ever.

As she considered this view of the case her heart burned and her pulses beat high. She was no craven spaniel, to crawl to a man's feet and implore him to try and love her still, or lick the hand that dealt her such a blow. She was as high-spirited as she was brave, and since Sir Wilfrid had left her of his own free will, and to marry another woman, he should never learn what his desertion had cost her.

She had her poor mother dependent on her for her daily support. She had her house to look after and provide for, and she had a duty to perform to herself. No man—so Jane Warner said indignantly—could have the power to make or mar her life. She should hate herself if she allowed it to be so. Had he been true to her, she would have loved him to his life's end—perhaps she might so love him still; she could not tell.

But she was sure that her love should never interfere with

her work. She was an individual like himself, with brains, and energy and will. If *he* could make a life apart from hers, violently separate himself from all that had seemed inseparable, and yet enjoy existence and put the past behind him, so could she.

She knew she was the stronger character of the two. Why should she be less able to make her life subservient to her will?

There was another argument which Jane might have used—the fact that a man so untrue to himself and her was not worthy her regard or constancy.

But she did not. Perhaps she was too wise to do so. If we only loved those creatures who are worthy of our esteem, there would be no affection left amongst us. Who is deserving of the love of his fellow creatures? Which of us does not transgress beyond reparation every hour? Thank heaven! we are not cared for according to our deserts, but receive our allowance of affection, abundantly or otherwise, according to the hearts in which we have reposed our trust.

Sir Wilfrid Ewell had thrown away one of the largest and most generous hearts in Christendom when he turned his back upon Jane Warner.

When she rose at last from that painful reverie, it was with the determination not to cast him from that heart, but to go on with her various duties as faithfully as if the care of him was still included in them. And she kept her resolution. She went about her house and garden on the following day as though nothing had occurred, and was as careful in catering for Mr. Cobble's breakfast and Miss Prosser's dinner as if she had never had another to think of and provide for, who had gone and taken the best part of her life with him.

Indeed, Jane bustled about a great deal more than usual during those first weeks of widowhood. She was indefatigable in searching for a lodger for her drawing-room floor, and succeeded before long in securing a married couple to take the vacant rooms. Autumn was coming on too, and the amount of digging and delving and pruning the garden required was something wonderful. Morning, noon, and night the girl was on her feet, running up and down stairs, cooking in the kitchen, or waiting in the parlour, and giving herself no rest whatever, nor a moment for quiet thought.

Mrs. Warner saw nothing of all this. She never noticed

anything that did not immediately concern herself or the dead lieutenant. But Miss Prosser did, and fancied that she knew the cause.

Miss Prosser was an old maid of about forty, sharp and keen-witted, and with an especially fine nose for a love affair. Like many single women who have missed their vocation in life and given up all hopes of ever being a wife or mother, she possessed a strong curiosity on all such matters, and was much interested to talk them over, and (if possible) to further them. Miss Prosser saw that Jane's cheerfulness was assumed, and that she exerted herself beyond her strength to avoid "the luxury of grief." She watched her narrowly for some time, and then one day she plucked up courage and questioned her upon the subject.

But Jane vehemently denied that she had any cause for trouble. Reddening to the roots of her hair, and giving the lie to her assertion in every feature, she still resolutely maintained that she was perfectly well in mind and body, and was in no need of help or sympathy from anyone.

Miss Prosser was repulsed, but not convinced. And as the days went on, Jane gave further evidence of the truth of her suspicion. She grew much thinner. Her pretty printdresses hung loosely about her neck and shoulders, and her cheeks grew hollow. Her spirits, too, suddenly gave way; and from having been extravagantly cheerful she became dull and despondent.

In fact, although the new lodgers were likely to become fixtures, and the finances were flourishing, and Mrs. Warner as well as possible, Jane drooped visibly, and lost both her appetite and powers of exertion. Her face displayed a frightened look, too, which had never been there before; and she seemed to avoid everybody except her mother.

Miss Prosser, although she was inquisitive and meddling, and sometimes gave the reins to a very sharp tongue, had a kindly heart, and pitied poor Jane excessively. She believed she knew the cause of her despondency, and determined to make her acknowledge it.

So one day she spoke to her openly on the subject, told her she was undermining her health, and rendering herself unfit to continue the charge of her mother, and begged her, if she had any secret trouble, to confide it to her, and see if there was no possible means by which it might be

cured. She could have used no argument so likely to unlock the spring of the poor girl's hidden grief. The idea that her services might be lost to her mother, and the helpless old woman be left to wander through life by herself, overcame all her scruples, and with dull tearless eyes, but many a sigh which came from the deepest recesses of her heart, Jane confessed that she *was* very unhappy, and longed for some friendly advice and assistance.

"You needn't tell me what it is, my dear," said Miss Prosser oracularly, "for I have guessed your secret."

Jane Warner coloured like a peony, and gazed into her face with startled eyes.

"Oh yes!" continued her companion confidently. "I am not blind nor deaf, my dear, though I am in the house but a few hours in the day. But it didn't take hours (nor yet minutes) to tell how the land lay between you and young Mr. Ewell. Why, I've known for years that you were sweet upon each other, and I think it's a scandalous shame, and nothing less, that he should have gone and married another woman. But men are all alike, my dear child, and if you knew as much about them as *I* do, you'd acknowledge there wasn't one in the world worth fretting after."

Jane's bosom heaved, and her hands trembled at this accusation, but she did not deny it.

"Now, isn't it Mr. Ewell, my dear—Sir Wilfrid Ewell, as I should say—who is the cause of your failing health and spirits?"

"Well, dear Miss Prosser, I don't mind telling *you*, because you have been a kind friend to mother and me for so long, and I am sure you will respect my confidence. Sir Wilfrid's marriage *has* been a great disappointment to me, because his conduct had led me to expect him to behave quite differently. But that is not the worst. My health troubles me. I know I am not well, and I ought to have a change. But how am I to leave the house and my mother? Believe me, *that* is the thought that is worrying and making me worse than I should otherwise be."

"You want to leave Chelsea for a little while."

"I do—indeed, I *must*. I feel that my health depends on it. I want to leave London, and go away into the country for a few months. Oh, Miss Prosser!" she continued, clasping her hands, "*do* think if there is not some way by which

I could accomplish it. I think my life will be the forfeit unless I do."

"Where would you go, Jane?"

"I have not thought of that yet; but my mother has relations in Wales, who, I have no doubt, would give me house-room until my health is re-established. But how am I to leave *her*? That is the great difficulty."

Miss Prosser thought a few minutes, and then she said:

"Well, Jane, I think I see a way out of it, if my plan seems feasible to you. Lady Brooke is leaving town for the country, and will not require my services on her return, as her girls are going to school. That means another situation for me. Now, if you like to leave the charge of your mother and your housekeeping in my hands, I will only take morning or afternoon work, which will give me half the day at home."

"Oh, how good you are!" cried Jane.

"My dear, I cannot afford to do it for nothing. I am a poor woman, you see, working for my bread, and if I consent to look after the lodgers in your absence, you must give me my rooms rent-free."

"Of course, Miss Prosser: both rent and board."

"No, my dear, the rent will cover my loss, and I shall be a gainer by having less work to do. For I, too, feel overworked at times, Jane. And then *your* room will be vacant, and can be let. We must get a young man to occupy it—I think I heard young Cobble say he had a friend who would like to lodge with him—and that will pay your expenses in the country."

"But suppose all this comes to pass—and it seems feasible—*what* am I to say to my mother for my apparent desertion of her? Shall I ever be able to make her understand the necessity of my going away?"

"Jane, if your health depends on it, you must go," replied her friend decidedly. "It will be better for Mrs. Warner to misunderstand your motives now than to lose her daughter's care altogether. Besides, you know what she is—a child in comprehension and feeling. Whatever she may think or say at the time, she will have forgotten it two days afterwards."

"Poor mother! Yes! I suppose she will," said Jane.

"My advice to you is, say nothing about it. Make your preparations in secret, and slip away without telling her."

I will engage to give her all the explanation that is necessary."

"I don't think I could make up my mind to that, Miss Prosser; but I will let her think I shall only be absent a week or two."

And so it came to pass that before Christmas time Jane Warner had made her escape from Chelsea to the care of her Welsh relations, leaving her mother, and the cottage, and her lodgers, in the charge of Miss Prosser.



CHAPTER XVII.

ROSIE.

THE gentlemen who were invited by Lady Otto's particular request to Lambscote Hall had completed their visit, and Captain Dorsay, after a fortnight of shooting, and fishing, and flirting, was preparing to return whence he came. But not before Sir Wilfred overheard his wife earnestly entreating him to visit them again at Christmas.

"You know you have nothing else to do, Jack, and we shall be as dull as ditch-water down here without you."

"You are very kind, Lady Ewell, and nothing would afford me greater pleasure, only, you see, I am already pledged to spend Christmas at Castle Blase, and I am afraid the Duke would be offended if I disappointed him."

"I know grandpapa numbers you amongst his best friends, but you owe something to mamma and me as well."

"I owe more than I can ever repay," replied Captain Dorsay, bowing.

"But I thought that *we* were to spend our Christmas with Lord Martyrdom, Lena," said Sir Wilfrid, joining in the conversation.

"I told you that my grandfather wished it," Lady Ewell answered pettishly; "but as you declared it was impossible we could leave your sister at Lambscote, I naturally considered the idea was at an end. Only fancy, Jack," she continued, turning her back upon her husband, "Sir Wilfrid actually proposed our taking that child to Castle Blase. As if grandpapa would ever have consented to it. You know what he is. He detests children and animals, and anything that makes a noise. And I'm sure I don't wonder at it. I detest them myself."

Captain Dorsay—who had looked upon Rosie Ewell as anything but a child during his stay at Lambscote—had gallantry sufficient to say a word in her defence, notwithstanding that it was his hostess he spoke to.

"But, my dear Lady Ewell, Lord Martyrdom could scarcely

call Miss Ewell a child. Old age has certainly made him marvellously indifferent to the beauties of nature by which he is surrounded ; but he would be insensible indeed if he could shut his eyes to the budding charms of your sister-in-law."

Captain Dorsay made this speech in order to conciliate Sir Wilfrid Ewell. He saw that the young man was hurt by the careless manner in which his wife was speaking, and he knew that on the feeling of the Baronet towards him depended his future invitations to the Hall.

His compliment had the desired effect. Sir Wilfrid simply said "Thank you," in answer to it, but Captain Dorsay saw that he was pleased. Lena, on the contrary, appeared almost offended.

"I dare say Rosie will be handsome when she is grown up ; but you cannot call a girl of fifteen a woman."

"My sister was sixteen last birthday," interposed her husband.

"Well, fifteen or sixteen ! it cannot make much difference. I know that *I* was considered in the nursery at that age, and so ought she to be."

At that moment Rosie, attired in her hat and riding-habit, appeared in the doorway. Glowing with health, with the figure of a woodland nymph, and the pure blood of youth mantling in her face, she looked very attractive, and Captain Dorsay's eyes, as they fell upon her, seemed to say so.

"Oh, Wilfrid !" she exclaimed, with an air of disappointment, "have you forgotten that you promised to ride with me?"

"My dear Rosie, I am very sorry, but I must plead guilty. I had quite forgotten it. And what is worse, I have made another engagement. I am going to drive Lena over to Maple Grove."

"Oh, pray don't think of me if you prefer riding with your sister !" exclaimed Lady Ewell, hoping he might take the hint. "I can amuse myself perfectly well at home."

"My darling, as if Rosie or anyone could come before you in my estimation ! Of course I shall go with you to Maple Grove. She is a good girl, and will never dream of being offended, will you, Rosie?"

"Certainly not," replied his sister, but her voice did sound

a little vexed in consequence. "I suppose I mustn't go alone, Wilfrid?"

"No, no, dear! I am sorry to disappoint you, but I cannot let you ride by yourself. You are not sufficiently used to horsemanship. I should be afraid of an accident."

"May I offer myself as Miss Ewell's escort?" interposed Captain Dorsay. "It is my last day at Lambscote, but I have never had the pleasure of riding with her yet. Will you trust her with me, Sir Wilfrid? I will take the utmost care of her. You may depend on me."

At this proposal the girl's dark eyes beamed with expectation, and her cheeks glowed like a peony.

She had already come to the conclusion that Captain Dorsay was quite the handsomest and finest man she had ever seen, and now she thought him the kindest. She glanced at her brother timidly, to hear what his decision would be, and was delighted to see him shake Captain Dorsay by the hand.

"Thank you so much, Dorsay. This is really kind of you, to offer to take charge of such a hoyden. She is very wild, remember. Don't agree to any of her insane proposals of racing down hill, or jumping over timber. She has no fear, but she has no seat, and will be over her horse's head before you know where she is."

"I promise that she shall not go over the horse's head whilst I have charge of her," replied Captain Dorsay. "Come, Miss Ewell, let us go and see after our horses. We must not waste another minute of this beautiful morning."

He led Rosie from the room as he spoke without another word to his hostess, and Lena felt considerably offended; indeed, so offended was she, that Sir Wilfrid had the pleasure of a drive with her in perfect silence, and when Captain Dorsay met her again she treated him in exactly the same manner. But he was not so easily daunted as the Baronet. He had arrived at that stage of indifference when he did not much care if Lady Ewell spoke to him or not, and his indifference made him bold. The first moment they found themselves alone he taxed her with rudeness.

"You do not seem very anxious that I should repeat my visit to Lambscote, Lady Ewell?" he commenced.

"What makes you think so?"

"The coolness with which you have treated me all the afternoon. I leave you to-morrow morning, and you have hardly addressed me since luncheon time. That is a great encouragement for me to come back again, isn't it?"

"If you *will* show me to my face that you care nothing for me, or my wishes, you must expect me to feel hurt and offended by it."

"To what do you allude?"

"To your preference for that child's society to mine. It is, as you say, your last day here, and instead of spending it with me, you gallop off, heaven knows where, with her, and do not reappear for hours."

He laughed derisively, as if her accusation were too silly to be combated or denied.

"What a goose you are! I credited you with more sense."

"Thank you. And I credited you with more tact. I little thought you would have accepted my invitation to Lambscote on purpose to insult me."

There is no suspicion of tears in her voice, but there is more than a suspicion of anger. Instead of being repulsed by it, however, Captain Dorsay, seeing a very small space between his hostess and the sofa-cushion, seats himself thereon, and squeezes down beside her.

"You are crushing me, Captain Dorsay."

"You deserve to be crushed for your stupidity. Who on earth do you suppose I came to Lambscote to see if it was not yourself? And how do you suppose I could continue to visit here if I am not on good terms with your husband? I offered to ride with Miss Ewell on purpose. I saw you had vexed Sir Wilfrid with your way of speaking of her, and I poured oil upon the wound. Had I sided with you, he would never have renewed his invitation. As it is, I scored honours. Do you know that my little *ruse* has already had the desired effect, and I have promised to return here in the spring? *Now* do you understand, you silly girl? And yet you abuse and distrust me. Oh, you women! There is not such a sentiment as gratitude amongst the lot of you!"

"For what am I supposed to be grateful?" demanded Lady Ewell, with a covert smile. "Your promised return?"

"No. For my devotion and fidelity, which continue to

burn undimmed, although you have deserted me and married another man."

"Oh, Jack! I never deserted you. You know that you would never have married me, nor any other woman. You are not a marrying man."

"It comes to the same thing. I can never hope now to do more than gaze into the closed gates of Paradise, like the lost Peri."

"You would make a lovely Peri!" exclaimed Lady Ewell, laughing. "And after all, Jack, with our sentiments, it is far better I should be married. I can see you now with the most perfect propriety. Before, it was just the least bit dangerous."

"Just so, Lena. I quite agree with you. But at the same time you will allow that it must be my policy to keep friends with your proprietor. I am afraid he has heard more than is quite advisable of our former acquaintanceship. He was a little bit shy of me on my first arrival. So I must put him off the scent, and there is no better way than by flattering him through my politeness to his sister."

"Don't carry your politeness too far, though, Jack, for Sir Wilfrid has spoken to me of your little gambling transactions, and other stories he has heard at his club, and he might not approve of you as a suitor for Miss Ewell's hand."

"*A suitor for her hand!*" repeated Captain Dorsay scornfully. "Now you *are* allowing your imagination to go a trifle too far, Lena. Did you not say just now that I am not a marrying man? How could I be? I have not money enough to keep myself."

"I was only joking. And are you really coming back to us after Christmas?"

"Really! Your lord and master followed me into the hall just now, and after thanking me again for my attention to Miss Ewell, asked me downright to return here when I left Castle Blase. At which I demurred a bit, thinking it politic not to seem too eager, but finally gave in, saying I would come if I possibly could. And *you* know that I shall note down the invitation in my pocket-book as one of the bright things I have to look forward to in the future."

"And *you* know that *one* person at least, at Lambscote, will be only too glad to see you," she answered softly.

The breeze had blown over, and the next morning Captain Dorsay took his departure from the Hall.

But Lena did not like Rosie any the better for having been the cause of this misunderstanding between herself and her old friend. She adopted the habit, when they were alone together, of introducing Captain Dorsay's name at all sorts of unexpected moments, and watching the girl's face narrowly to see how she took it. And if Rosie started, or flushed, as she was apt to do, or appeared unusually interested, Lady Ewell would launch out into such abuse of the absent as would have astonished anyone who knew that she called him her friend.

She told Rosie (all in the strictest confidence, of course) that he was a bad man, and not to be trusted—that he gambled, and drank, and did all sorts of dreadful things—and that no one (especially women) should believe a word he said to them. And when Rosie, with wide-open eyes, would ask her *why*, if this were the case, she admitted Captain Dorsay to her friendship, Lena replied that he was an old favourite of the family—that he had been her father's friend, and was that of her grandfather, and it was an easy way of showing him attention to ask him down to Lambscote Hall. She cautioned Rosie, especially, not to repeat a word of what she had said to her brother. She asserted that Wilfrid liked Captain Dorsay, that he was a man who might be excessively useful to him if he stood for the county—in fact (although so dangerous an acquaintance for the fair sex) he was everything that could be desired as an associate for his own.

Rosie Ewell, young, innocent, and quite inexperienced, swallowed all her sister-in-law told her as Gospel truth (as indeed it was), and only heaved a few tender sighs to think that so nice-looking and so pleasant a man should be ineligible as a friend. Of course, it was no business of hers—Captain Dorsay could never be any more to her than he was—but she was sorry for him, very, *very* sorry, and wished that she could do him some good. The very young are generally ready to believe that they are cut out for reformers, and that a few words from them would have a marvellous effect in redeeming the lost, however hardened and degraded they may be.

Rosie, in thinking over what Lena had told her, often rehearsed in anticipation the arguments she would use to

convince Captain Dorsay of the wicked life he was leading, should the subject ever be approached between them. The stories which her sister-in-law had intended to shock and horrify her, only made her miserable and very full of pity for the unhappy sinner. The knowledge had come too late. Unconsciously to herself, the poor child's fancy was already taken by the handsome man of the world, and all her wish was, not to avoid, but to redeem him. Accordingly, when they met again in the spring, Rosie was very shy with Captain Dorsay, but very tender. He caught her soft eyes dwelling on him at unexpected moments, and watched the deep blush with which they met his own, and he was flattered by her interest in him, and desirous to augment it. But he was too cautious to pay her any but the most ordinary attentions before her brother. It was only when they met accidentally on the staircase, or he stole a few minutes with her in the garden, out of sight and hearing of the Hall, that Jack Dorsay ventured to try and gain her confidence, or persuade her she was more to him than an ordinary acquaintance. It was during one of these interviews, when he had accused her of coldness in meeting his advances, that the girl ventured to tell him what Lady Ewell had confided to her, and to entreat him, with tears in her eyes, to give up all his wicked practices, and be a good man before it was too late.

Captain Dorsay saw through Lena's meaning at once. His mind, used to all sorts of artifices, deciphered at a glance the puzzle which was Greek in Rosie's unsophisticated eyes, and he registered a vow of vengeance against Lady Ewell for her interference in his affairs.

"Hang it all!" he thought, "I can forgive one woman for being jealous of another, but I can't put up quietly with her vilifying my character in order to gain her own way."

But to Rosie Ewell he only said :

"And do you really feel sufficient interest in so unworthy a creature as myself, as to care what becomes of me or where I go?"

"Oh, Captain Dorsay, how can you ask such a question? Of course I do! Is it not my duty? Ought we not to care for all our fellow-creatures the same as for ourselves?"

A labourer was passing at the time, laden with hod and pickaxe, on his way to his evening meal.

"Then, I suppose, you care as much about that fellow's

mode of life as you do for mine? Why don't you ask *him* how he spends his evenings, or if he ever says his prayers, or thinks of all the good things you have been talking about?"

Rosie's eyes were full of tears.

"Yes, I suppose I do," she faltered, "or I ought."

"Only you *don't*," interposed Captain Dorsay laughing, and taking her hands in his. "Now, I wonder what I've done to be so fortunate as to create an interest in you."

She did not answer, and he drew her closer to him.

"I think it must be, though it sounds conceited to say so, because you have begun to care just a little bit for me, as I do for you."

"Do you care for me?" she asked, with a sudden light in her dark eyes.

"Indeed I do! Who could help caring for you, or admiring you, or—or loving you, Rosie?"

"Oh, Captain Dorsay! but I am so young."

"That is a fault on the right side in your sex, my dear, and one that I will never blame you for. But we must say nothing of this to anybody—not just yet."

"Oh no, no! I couldn't bear to."

"Not even to Sir Wilfrid or Lady Ewell. It shall be our own sweet little secret—eh, Rosie? and we will keep it all to ourselves. And some day, when you have taught me to be good, perhaps——"

"You want no teaching, you *are* good," she interposed eagerly.

"Well, then, let me say, when we know each other better, and are quite sure of our own minds, we will take your brother into our confidence. And till then we will tell no one that we love, except each other, Rosie."

"I never—*never* shall want to tell it to anyone but you," she answered.

But between such a man and such a girl it was a dangerous secret to keep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DISCOVERED.

It was not long, however, before Lena (lynx-eyed concerning anything which cast a slight on her own powers of attraction) found out there was something between her sister-in-law and Captain Dorsay. *He* was cautious enough. He was too much used to little affairs of the kind not to be an adept at concealment. His feelings might be all upon the rack, and his pulses throbbing with excitement—still Jack Dorsay was collected enough to meet the eyes of the woman he cared for without a change of countenance, or to touch her hand without trembling. But with poor little Rosie it was very different. She blushed if he spoke to her in the presence of others, until her cheeks burned, and her eyes were suffused with unshed tears; and she could only take refuge in utter silence and apparent melancholy when he was by.

Sir Wilfrid first noticed the alteration in her appearance, and drew his wife's attention to it. After which Lady Ewell watched the girl every hour of the day, and allowed nothing that she did to escape her eye. She saw after a while that Rosie was generally absent in the afternoon, whilst Lady Otto and she sat together, and asked her one day abruptly where she went, and what she did during those periods.

"*What do I do?*" repeated the girl, colouring brightly. "Why, I walk about the park and grounds, of course! What else should I do? The village is far too uninteresting to invite a visit."

"Well, *I* think, and so does mamma, that it would be better for so young a girl to remain at home with us, instead of scampering about the country by herself."

"I don't scamper," cried Rosie; "and oh, Lena! *I could* not sit all day working and reading, like you and Lady Otto. It makes my head ache. Wilfrid knows that I never was well unless I had plenty of fresh air."

"I should think Sir Wilfrid was an excellent judge of the requirements of a young lady," replied Lena, with a sneer. "If he had taken my advice you would now be at school,

which is the proper place for you. If you are such a child that you may outrage all the rules of propriety, you ought to be under some control. If you are a young woman fit to take your place in society, you should behave as other ladies do. That is *my* opinion. You never see *me* rushing about the park with a pack of hounds at my heels, and I neither approve of it nor think it proper."

But *Hesie*, though young, had a spirit, and it rose against this petty tyranny.

"Let us put the question to my brother, then, and hear what he says about it. *Lainboscote* is *his* house, and whilst I am in it I will always obey any order he may give me."

She left the room as she spoke, and *Lady Otto* looked at *Lady Ewell*."

"You are going too far, my dear," she said; "I have told you so before. If you don't let *Sir Wilfrid* have his own way with his sister, there will be a quarrel between you."

"And what do I care if there is?" she retorted.

"But I can't see the object of it. Why should you resent *Miss Ewell* walking about the country? What harm does it do you? You don't care for her society. Why not leave her to her own devices?"

"Because she will probably disgrace us all if I do."

"I can't say I follow you, *Lena*."

"Mamma, I don't believe she walks alone. I am almost sure *Jack* meets her, or joins her by pre-appointment, and they go together."

"Well, that is no business of yours either. *Captain Dorsay* is here by *Sir Wilfrid's* own invitation, and I suppose he is quite capable of looking after his sister. Probably—if your surmises are true—he knows all about it."

"But, mamma, just think of *Jack's* character, and the reputation he maintains amongst women! You know he is not a fit companion for a young girl. Heaven knows what he may say to her."

"It is a pity you did not think of that before you invited him to *Lainboscote*," replied her mother drily.

"It is altogether a different case," said *Lady Ewell*, tossing her head. "I am a married woman, and can see whom I like. But a silly child like *Rosie Ewell* will take everything he says for Gospel, and have her head completely turned by it."

"My dear, I don't think Rosie is such a fool as you take her for. And how do you know that Captain Dorsay may not be in earnest?"

But this view of the matter was the very last Lady Ewell was anxious to adopt.

"*In earnest*, mamma! What nonsense! How could he be? You know he has no money."

"I know that his fortune is very small compared to what most young ladies expect in the present day. But should Captain Dorsay seriously contemplate marriage, his money will not stand in the way. I don't like the man, Lena, as you well know; but I have known an honest love reform worse men than he, and if he is really in earnest, you have no right to interfere to prevent it."

"But I have a right to see that my sister-in-law is not made a fool of. I suppose you will allow as much as *that*, mamma," said Lady Ewell hotly; "and I certainly think that Wilfrid should be informed of it at once."

"Of what are you going to inform him?" inquired Lady Otto. "You don't know yet that Miss Ewell meets or walks with anyone. And don't forget that if you make a false move in the matter, you will put yourself in the wrong box with all three of them."

Lady Ewell did not overlook this fact. She longed to find out the truth about Rosie, but she felt that she must prove her suspicions to be correct before she could take any means to prevent the calamity she dreaded. So she resolved to watch, and convince herself. As she pondered on the best means of accomplishing her object, Rosie entered the room hanging on her brother's arm.

"I have told Wilfrid what you said to me, Lena, about walking in the park alone," she commenced boldly, "and he says no possible harm can come to me there, and I may wander about it all day long with the utmost safety."

"Of course, if you walk *alone* you must be safe," replied Lady Ewell, with an emphasis that made Rosie colour. "But it was in case of your meeting anyone there that I felt nervous."

"There is no need for it, my darling, I assure you," interposed Sir Wilfrid, "though I thank you all the same for your care of my little Rosie. But who *could* she meet except some of our own labourers? No tramps can ever get over those

formidable palings. The park is as perfectly secluded as the garden. I remember poor Robert's little boy used to run about it alone."

"If you are satisfied with your sister's safety, Wilfrid, not another word need be said upon the subject. I thought it rather a hoydenish amusement for a young woman, that is all, and as you are always so anxious to impress upon me that Rosie is no longer a child——"

"Oh come, come!" he said good-naturedly, "some young women like walking and running about as much as children, and I have never tried to make her out old enough to be a cripple, have I?"

"My dear Wilfrid, pray don't say any more about it. Of course, Rosie will follow her own inclinations in the future. Come, mamma, is it not time we put on our things? I ordered the carriage for three o'clock. I won't ask you to join us, Rosie. Driving is, I expect, much too quiet an amusement for you. You had better go and have another scamper in the park," saying which, Lady Ewell swept from the room.

"Isn't she horribly cross?" whispered Rosie to her brother. "Everything I do or say seems to offend her now."

Sir Wilfrid sighed.

"Don't sigh, dear Wilfrid. I don't mind it for myself; but I am so sorry to be the cause of these constant altercations between you."

"It is not your fault, Rosie; indeed, I hardly know whose fault it is. I love Lena dearly, but I seem unable to make her happy. I am afraid this life is duller than what she has been accustomed to."

"Dull! Oh, Wilfrid, how *can* she be dull in this beautiful place, with so many objects of interest around her?"

"But she takes no interest in them, my dear. She will not ride on horseback, nor drive herself. She never visits anyone in the village. She yawns if I give her any details of the estate or farm, and she screams if a dog jumps at her side, or a cow lows in the park-meadow. How can anyone with such tastes care for a country life?"

"What did she marry you for, then?" cried Rosie indignantly. "She liked Lambcote Hall well enough in prospect. I think you spoil her, Wilfrid, and that's a fact."

"Ah well, dear, she made a great concession in marrying me, and the least I can do in return is to indulge her fancies to the utmost of my power. I shall be glad when the season commences, though, and we go up to town. Perhaps dear Lena will be more contented when she has theatres and parties to fill up her time."

Rosie made a face of dissatisfaction.

"I hate the idea of London ; so you see how people differ in their tastes. And so I will go and have a run in the park whilst I may," she added, kissing her brother, "for I shall have nothing but the remembrance of these past pleasures to amuse me when once the season has commenced."

She ran down the gravelled terrace that led through a shrubbery into the park, followed by her little fox-terrier, and there, after awhile, she came, quite accidentally of course, upon Captain Dorsay, smoking a cigar as he sauntered along.

Rosie did not affect to be surprised. She had known beforehand that he would be there, and her eyes beamed welcome upon him as their hands met.

"Do you know that I've been walking up and down here for more than an hour, Rosie?" said Captain Dorsay. "Whatever kept you so long?"

"I have been talking with my brother and Lena, Jack. Only fancy, she is so ill-natured she wanted Wilfrid to forbid my walking in the park alone. She said it was dangerous. But I am sure it was only her spite because she saw I enjoyed it. Can she possibly have found out that I meet you, Jack?"

"Whew!" whistled Captain Dorsay, in dismay. But the minute after he shook his head.

"No, Rosie; it is not likely. How should she? She never comes so far herself, and we have never met any one likely to report it to her."

"Except the housemaid, Anne, last Tuesday."

"Lady Ewell is not the sort of person to talk to her housemaids, Rosie."

"No! but the housemaids talk to the other servants, and her lady's-maid might have told it to her."

"If she did, what had she to say? That she met us walking together in the park. Is that such an extraordinary

thing to occur between a lady and gentleman staying in the same house?"

"No, of course not! only—— Oh, Jack! how much I wish that you would tell dear Wilfrid everything. You don't know how kind he is, nor how good to me. I should feel so happy if he knew all and approved of it. And then Lena could never interfere between us again, nor say nasty things."

"My dear little Rosie," exclaimed Dorsay, as he wound his arm about the figure of the blushing girl, "I have told you already that at present it is quite impossible. Cannot you trust me to act for the best. I am not in a position to marry, my darling girl. Sir Wilfrid would never listen to my proposals—would be much more likely, indeed, to forbid my ever seeing you again, and that would break my heart, Rosie—I should never survive it."

"But *why* should he say so?" demanded Rosie affectionately. "If it is your poverty that stands in the way, Jack, why, we can wait any number of years. I don't want to be married, dear, I would much rather not; but I want my brother to know you love me, and to hear him say that he is glad it should be so."

"How *could* he be glad that you should even think of marrying a penniless beggar double your age, and who can only be the means of preventing your making a better settlement. No, my darling, I am certain that if Sir Wilfrid once gets wind of this little affair it will be all over between you and me. And unless you want to get rid of me, Rosie, and never see my face again, you will no longer urge me to such an avowal."

The girl's face clouded with disappointment, but she was not angry with him.

"Of course you must know best; but it makes me feel such a hypocrite," she answered. "Sometimes when Wilfrid jokes me about being in love, or married, I am more inclined to cry than laugh. And if, when you go away this time, he does not ask you back again, what shall I do then?"

"Oh! he *will* ask me back, never fear. I have made myself so agreeable to him lately that I don't think he will be able to do without me long. And I *must* come back, mustn't I, for my little Rosie's sake as well as my own?"

The poor child was crying now, more for the indefiniteness

of her prospects, and a secret instinct that something must be wrong, than for any special grief, and Jack Dorsay drew her into his arms and tried to comfort her.

They were standing thus, closely enfolded, and thinking only of each other, when they were startled by hearing an approaching footstep.

"Dry your eyes, quick—quick! somebody is coming," whispered Captain Dorsay to his young companion, and she was hurriedly following his directions when Lady Ewell stood before them.

Anger was flashing in her eyes and mantling on her cheeks, but, taking no heed of Captain Dorsay, she walked straight up to Rosie Ewell's side.

"You wretched girl!" she exclaimed. "I guessed how it was. You must come home at once with me to your brother."

She grasped her by the arm as she spoke, but Rosie shook her off, and drew nearer to Captain Dorsay.

"Don't you dare to touch me!" she said defiantly; "you have no right to call me by such names, nor to force me to return with you. Jack, speak to her. Tell her there is no harm."

"No harm, indeed!" repeated Lady Ewell passionately. "What worse harm could there be than in finding you alone here with Captain Dorsay? And pretending all the time, too, that you were walking in the park for the sake of the fresh air. You shameless, deceitful girl! You are a disgrace to your sex."

Captain Dorsay, who had been waiting till the fair Lena's wrath should have somewhat exploded, now considered it time that he should interfere.

"Gently—gently! Lady Ewell, if you please. You are going a little too far," he said. "I do not think that even Sir Wilfrid would find fault with my accompanying his sister in her afternoon walk."

"Do you suppose I didn't see you?" she retorted sharply, "with your arms round her waist, and kissing her as openly as if she had been your wife? Don't attempt to deceive me, Jack. I have suspected how things were going on between you for some time past, and was determined to see for myself. And you shall not disgrace the family by making a fool of this girl for your own amusement, and I tell you so, once and

for ever. It is lucky I have discovered your tricks before they had gone too far."

"*Disgrace!* How dare you speak of such a thing in connection with—with Jack and me?" cried Rosie, with her face aflame. "He is going to marry me, some day—are you not, Jack—when he has more money; and——"

"*Going to marry you!*" repeated Lena, with withering scorn. "A likely story. As if Captain Dorsay would, or *could*, ever marry anybody. He knows well enough that there is a barrier that must ever prevent——"

"Lady Ewell," exclaimed Dorsay hastily, "I must entreat you to hold your tongue. That story was told to you in the strictest confidence—it is known to scarcely any other—and if you repeat it now you will be guilty of breaking your own most sacred word."

"I will be silent on only one condition—that you tell this girl before me that there is an insuperable obstacle to your marrying her (or any woman), and that you never *could* have entertained the idea of marriage whilst making love to her."

"Miss Ewell knows it," he replied uneasily; "I have told her plainly. I repeated it only to day—that I cannot marry—that it is impossible. She has been perfectly aware of the fact from the beginning."

"And yet you could go on meeting him, and kissing him," said Lena to Rosie. "You are a paragon of virtue, upon my word!"

Rosie, for her part, was leaning up against a tree, white and breathless with surprise.

"Not *now*, Jack," she gasped; "I knew you could not marry me just now. But by-and-by, surely, you have said again and again—indeed, I had no doubt but that you would marry me by-and-by."

"I must beg, Miss Ewell," interposed Lena, with virtuous severity, "that you will not call this gentleman by his Christian name in my presence. What has happened behind my back, I thank Heaven I neither know nor care; but whilst I am by, I request you will remember that I belong to the same family as yourself."

Rosie hardly heeded what she said. She was still staring, speechless, in Jack Dorsay's face.

"And now, Captain Dorsay," resumed Lady Ewell, "I am still waiting for you to fulfil your promise; or you may tempt

me to break mine, and inform Miss Ewell of the reason that it is impossible you should take the duties of marriage upon yourself."

"You could hardly be so mean, Lady Ewell, as to break an oath which——"

"And why did you make me take that oath?" she interrupted him shrilly. "Why did you tell me the secret of your life, except that you had no other excuse for not proposing to marry *me*, because you had made love to me for so long and so passionately?"

"Hush! hush! Lena, for God's sake! If you have no respect for me, have some for yourself—for your husband."

"*My husband!* Much respect *you* have had for either my husband or myself. Have I not dozens of letters in your writing—many written since my marriage—swearing unalterable fidelity to me, and——"

"Rosie, I entreat you, leave us!" he ejaculated; "go back to the house. This is no scene, no knowledge for you."

"No, no! I will stay, and I will know all," she answered.

"I *mean* you to know all," said Lena, "all that man's treachery and falsehood. He has been my lover for years, he professes to be my lover still; and, if it had not been that he *cannot* marry me, I never should have married your brother. But no other woman shall have him, whilst I stand by to prevent it. He shall not deceive another girl as he did me. You are *mine*, Jack," she continued fiercely, "mine by virtue of that secret, and when you desert me, the world shall know it as plainly as I do."

"*What* is this secret?" demanded Rosie, in a faint voice.

"Captain Dorsay, *do* tell me. Let me know the worst at once."

"The worst is, Miss Ewell, what you have already heard. I am not a marrying man. I *never* shall be."

"You never meant to marry me then?"

"I never *could* have meant it, for it is impossible."

"And—and it is true what she says—you love *her*!"

"Really, I am placed in a very awkward and unpleasant predicament between you!" exclaimed the captain. "I do not think it is either generous or politic of Lady Ewell to have introduced that subject, nor do I see how I can, as a gentleman and man of honour, endorse it."

"Don't let your *honour* stand in the way," said Lena, with

a sneer; "nor mine either. You *know* that it is true, that for years past you have been my lover, and that I have any number of proofs to bring forward to establish the fact. Why not be a man and acknowledge it?"

"Pray acknowledge it!" said Rosie; "it is better I should know everything."

"I cannot deny that I have been fortunate enough to enjoy much of Lady Ewell's favour *before* she was Lady Ewell," replied Captain Dorsay; "but naturally that is all over now."

"You know better. It is *not* over. You told me only last night that it would never be," interposed Lena.

"You will not allow me to say a word for myself," he said, turning away.

"It is enough. I don't want to hear any more," sobbed Rosie; "I have been very foolish, I dare say, and very easily imposed upon; but you know, Captain Dorsay, that what she thinks is not true."

"I am perfectly aware that no one but myself has been to blame in this matter," he replied, "and I ask your pardon, Miss Ewell, for any unpleasantness to which it may have given rise."

He raised his hat and turned away as he spoke, feeling very shamefaced at being found out, and very revengeful towards the one who had wrought this mischief between him and Rosie.

And she, too, with one parting glance at him, commenced to retrace her steps in the opposite direction. Lena, who did not know what revelations she might not, in the innocence of her heart, immediately make to her brother, sprung after her.

"You cannot go home alone in this state, Rosie. Let me go with you."

"No, no. I do not want anyone—you, least of all. Please leave me entirely to myself."

"But what are you going to do? You must not repeat what has occurred to Wilfrid. If you do, you will make irremediable mischief, and cover yourself with irremediable shame. A man views these things with a different eye from a woman. He will never believe but what you encouraged Captain Dorsay—as indeed you must have done—before he would have dared to meet you alone in this way."

"Oh, Lena, pray spare me! I mean to tell no one. I only want to forget it all as soon as possible."

"I dare say I seemed very harsh to you," continued Lady Ewell, whose *rôle* it now was to conciliate the girl's outraged feelings; "but I was angry with *him*, and not with you, dear. *He* ought to be ashamed of himself to try and take you in in so treacherous a manner. And when you have time for reflection, you will see how lucky it is that I *did* have my eyes open, and interfered in time to save you from greater misery. He is a dangerous man, Rosie, and it is only by heaven's mercy that I did not fall a victim to him myself."

"Yes, yes; I understand it perfectly. The only thing I want now is to get away from Lambseote, and forget it all."

"Well, I dare say it would be better if you were to go to your mother's for a time," responded Lena, who was not at all averse to the idea of getting the girl out of the way; "and then, when Jack has gone, you know, you can come back again."

"I will *never* come back," cried Rosie passionately. "I never wish to come back. For I *hate* you, Lena; I would rather see *him* than I would see you, and remember the wicked, cruel things that you have said to-day."

Lady Ewell grew alarmed at her sister-in-law's vehemence.

"What wicked, cruel things? What nonsense are you talking about?"

"Oh, don't think I have forgotten! or that I am such a fool I cannot understand. I heard what you said about Captain Dorsay writing to you since your marriage to poor Wilfrid, and I could not stay here day after day and see all my brother's love and devotion for you, and not tell him of it, I am *sure* I couldn't."

"Oh, then, the sooner you go the better!" rejoined Lady Ewell coolly. "But mind you, Miss Rosie, if you begin telling tales of me, you will find perhaps that I am cleverer at that sort of thing than you are. It will only be your word against mine, and I think if it comes to a trial of strength between us for Wilfrid's affection, that *I* am as likely as not to win the day."

"I don't want to tell him anything; it would make him so very miserable," sobbed Rosie. "Only I must go away."

"By all means. But what excuse will you make? Your brother will require a reason for your rejecting his hospitality. You were supposed to be a fixture here for life."

"I will say that we cannot agree, you and I. I am sure it is true enough."

"Perfectly; and I have no objection to it. I can endorse your opinion if Sir Wilfrid appeals to me."

But as they neared the Hall, Lady Ewell proposed an amendment.

"Perhaps it would be better if you were to tell Wilfrid that you feel dull here without companions of your own age, and that you want to go back to your sisters. That would be a pleasanter way out of it."

"I don't want a pleasanter way out of it. I shall tell him the truth, that I refuse to live any longer in the same house with you," cried Rosie angrily as she flew up to her own chamber and bolted herself in.

Then Lady Ewell saw that matters had come to a crisis, and went to apprise Lady Otto of what had occurred, and to secure her championship when the storm should burst over Lambscote Hall.



CHAPTER XIX.

HOME.

It was near upon Christmas-day when Jane Warner left her home in Chelsea to go to Wales. It was near upon May-day before she returned again. Miss Prosser said she could not have believed she would have stayed away from her mother and her garden so long. But the letters she received gave a very bad account of her health. Sometimes Jane wrote them herself, sometimes the friend with whom she was staying—an aunt of her father's, who signed herself quaintly "Patty Penryn," wrote for her. Now, the girl was rather better, and now worse; but at no time was she pronounced well enough to return to London.

Jane's whole anxiety during the period of her absence seemed to be for her mother. What did Mrs. Warner think of her leaving home? What did she do? What did she say? In real truth, Mrs. Warner neither said, nor did, nor thought anything. Since she had been waiting for eight or ten years for the return of the deceased lieutenant, and had not yet arrived at the conclusion that his cruise was rather a prolonged one, it was not likely that she should have considered Jane's absence of five months an extraordinary occurrence. She asked Miss Prosser regularly each morning when her daughter would return, and being told probably that evening, was quite content until the following day.

Children and old people are always selfish, and generally ungrateful. The blood runs too fast in children and too slowly in old age. A mother who has spent the best part of her youth in rearing and nursing her little ones, who has loved them and watched them, and sacrificed her comfort for them, dies with but one thought in her heart—how will her treasures get on without her? And the treasures, having asked why their mother does not come downstairs, and been informed that she has gone to live in heaven and they will not see her again until they, too, die, are quite consoled by the promise of jam for tea, and a beautiful new black frock to remember poor mamma by. There is a blessed immunity

from care in the very young, and it is often renewed in the very old. Mrs. Warner's feeble mind could be coaxed from dwelling upon any subject by the diversion of a bunch of radishes or a buttered muffin.

Jane's fears, however, were not so much for her mother's peace of mind, as for her falling ill during her absence. But no such calamity occurred. The worst that happened was that, not being under the same dread of Miss Prosser's anger as she was under that of her daughter, Mrs. Warner contrived on several occasions to elude her vigilance, and trot about Chelsea by herself, thereby causing a lot of trouble with the tradespeople, and confusion in their bills, for the cakes and sweetstuff she had obtained on credit; and also she got into the garden once or twice, and had nipped off the head of every winter flower before Miss Prosser knew what mischief she was after. She had made a fearful raid in this direction just before Jane's return home, and Miss Prosser, knowing the girl's great love for her garden, was quite nervous at the thought of her displeasure when she should first catch sight of it. But she need not have been afraid.

Jane Warner came back to Chelsea so thin and anxious-looking and *distracted*, that she was not like the same person who had gone away. She seemed to have grown ten years older. Her delicate complexion was almost bloodless, and her deep blue eyes stood out from the rest of her face preternaturally grave and large. She was quite hysterical, too, as she clasped her mother in her arms, and looked her over as if she would ascertain if she had sustained any injury since she had seen her last.

The old lady did not participate in her daughter's emotion. Indeed, she was rather offended than otherwise at Jane's rough handling, and only begged her to remember she wore her Tanjore brooch, without making any remark upon her return to Chelsea.

"But are you not glad I have come back to you, dear, poor little mother?" exclaimed Jane, with her sweet eyes full of tears. "I thought of you every day I was away, darling, and I am so happy to be here again. I hope it will be the last time we ever separate."

"I hope it *will* be the last time, Jane," said Mrs. Warner, alluding to the rumpling of her cap-ribbons, which she was

trying to smooth with her fingers, "for these are my best ribbons. Miss Prosser gave them to me for being so quiet in church—didn't you, Miss Prosser? And they are the very best satin; and now Jane has creased them so, I do not believe they will ever be smooth again."

Jane turned away with a deep sigh. She felt as mothers must feel if they are able to hover about the nursery which holds their orphaned little ones, and hear them squabble over a cake before their own coffins have left the house.

"She is not a bit changed," she said to Miss Prosser.

"Well, my dear girl, and did you expect her to be so? She'll never change this side the grave, Jane, and you ought to be thankful she doesn't feel things more than she does. But *you* are changed, my dear—terribly changed! I don't think I ever saw a person so altered in my life. Whatever has been the matter with you?"

Jane blushed crimson, and looked for a moment like her old self again.

"I have been ill, dear Miss Prosser, as my letters told you, and in very bad spirits. But I am better now, thank God, and never mean to shirk my duty again."

"*That* you never have done, Jane," cried Miss Prosser energetically, "nor ever will. I've done my duty, as far as I could, my dear, by the trust you reposed in me, and I think it has answered well. Young Cobble is still here, and his friend Johnson. So are the Maxwells, and they all express themselves very well satisfied with everything. So I consider them fixtures. I had to send Sarah away—as I told you—for taking some loose silver off the Maxwells' table; but the new maid, Caroline, is worth six of her, so I consider *that* a change for the better. The garden is not so neat as I should like to see it, Jane," continued Miss Prosser falteringly, "knowing what a favourite it is of yours; but, you see, I have really had no time to look after it myself, and your poor dear mother——"

"Never mind the garden, my dear, kind friend!" exclaimed Jane; "but tell me of yourself! How has this arrangement suited *you*? Are you out of pocket by it, or is the work too hard?"

"Not at all, my dear; and, indeed do you know, I think I am the gainer. I have a capital situation at a school—they pay better than private houses—where I take a class of fifty

girls every afternoon for French and elocution. I like it very much. It is less trying than being with children all day. And then I have had my mornings to look after the cottage, and my evenings for needlework. Oh! I have been very happy, my love—very, *very* happy!”

“I am so glad,” replied Jane; “and so much obliged to you, dear Miss Prosser, you cannot think. I do not know to whom else I could have confided the charge of my poor helpless mother.”

“I have been occupying your room till yesterday, Jane, but it is nicely put in order for you now.”

“Where will you sleep, then, Miss Prosser? Mr. Johnson, I suppose, is in your old quarters?”

“Yes, my dear; and I wouldn’t turn him out for the world, for he is one of the nicest young men you ever saw, and so liberal. He pays two guineas a week for his room and breakfast; and Mr. Cobble expects a supper for that, too, as you know.”

“Then we certainly must keep Mr. Johnson,” said Jane, with a ghost of her old smile. “But what will *you* do?”

“Well, Jane, if you’ve no objection, I’ll share the room with your mother. She has become used to me, you know, and I think it will save you a world of trouble. You are looking anything but strong, my dear, and must not have your night’s rest broken.”

“Let it be so for awhile, dear friend,” said Jane, “and we will talk it over at our leisure.”

The upshot of this conversation was that Miss Prosser continued to live on with them almost as one of the family. Jane’s foresight made her see the benefit of this arrangement. Her mother was safer in the charge of Miss Prosser than left with a servant, and the servant had more time to look after the requirements of the lodgers. *She* also had leisure for walking and gardening and shopping, and the general direction of the household. She took up all her duties just where she had dropped them, and performed them to the utmost of her power. But health did not come back to Jane’s cheek, nor peace to her mind, for all her faithfulness.

Miss Prosser observed with pain how altered the poor child was—how from seriousness she had passed to sadness, which sometimes culminated in a mood almost of despair.

Her greatest pleasure seemed to consist in receiving letters from Mrs. Patty Penryn, which she used to devour eagerly ; and one day Miss Prosser remarked that she appeared to have grown much attached to her relative.

"Oh yes! she was so very kind and good to me," replied Jane ; "and she has promised me, if I go first, to look after dear mother. And she is coming to London soon," continued the girl, with a heightened colour ; "perhaps next month, and then you will make her acquaintance, Miss Prosser, and see what a dear good creature she is."

So May came and went, and the June flowers once more flung their sweetness over Chelsea. The anniversary was coming round of that time when Wilfrid Ewell had stood in the garden and told Jane of his good fortune—that fortune she so fully believed she was to share with him—and of that other time too, that cowardly, shameful time, when he broke the news to her that she was no wife of his, and asked her to give up her good name and sacrifice her prospects for his sake.

Did she think of it as she wandered through her dear old garden, over which the roses once more shed their fragrance, and where the blue irises, and the striped grass and the gillyflowers had risen as high as her knees? If she did, she made no outward moan. The name of Wilfrid Ewell never passed her lips, and if she too much honoured his remembrance with a tear, it fell into the trumpet of the honeysuckle, or the bell of the campanula, and was not seen by mortal eyes. But Jane became very anxious about that time to coax her mother to spend more time in the garden. The fresh air was so good for her, she said, and the sight of the blossoms and the song of the birds diverted her mind from dwelling too continuously upon one idea. She even tried, though with small success, to utilize Mrs. Warner, by making her weed the beds or rake the mould ; but the old lady soon grew tired of anything like work.

"What is the use of my looking amongst the flowers and shrubs for little green things, Jane? Why cannot you leave them alone? I am sure they are very pretty."

"But, mother, you don't know what you might find if you persevere in digging every day. I have read of people coming upon hidden treasures in old gardens like this."

"What is treasure, Jane?"

"Everything that is of value. Boxes of money, or jewellery, or gold. Would it not be delightful to find one?"

"My brooch is jewellery. Miss Prosser said so," replied Mrs. Warner, putting up her hand to feel if that inestimable ornament were safe.

"Of course it is, dear! So are many other things. Oh! do go on looking carefully, mother, every day, and I am sure you will find something of value before long."

And every morning Jane would try to stimulate her mother's energy by asking her if she had looked behind the bushes yet, or in the lily-bed, and assuring her she would find a treasure there some day. But she never mentioned the subject in the presence of Miss Prosser.

One morning, when Mrs. Warner had trotted out as usual at her daughter's bidding, she reappeared in the sitting-room with a mysterious air, and her finger to her lip. Jane—all white and trembling—rose, and followed her to the outer air.

"Jane," she whispered in her ear, "it has come!"

"What has come, dear mother?" asked the girl, trying to speak calmly.

"The treasure, my dear; a basket full of it, under the bushes! I cannot remember when I dug it up, but I must have done so, for it is there. And it is making a dreadful noise. Come and see it!"

"Dear mother! what *are* you talking about?" said Jane, with quivering lips. And then she called the servant. "Caroline, Mrs. Warner wants me to go and see something at the bottom of the garden, but I am too busy. Go with her, and come back and tell me what it is. It is most likely only her fancy."

She turned away to the dining-room window as she spoke, and tried to look at the people passing in the street, and to fix her mind only on them. But in another minute the servant had run shrieking back into the cottage.

"Good gracious, Caroline! what is the matter?"

"Oh Lor', miss! you'll never believe it; but come and see for yourself, please. And it isn't the mistress's fancy at all, miss! It's true as Gospel, and she is so pleased she's been the one to find it."

"To find *what*, Caroline?"

"A baby, miss! A lovely little baby in long clothes!"

"A baby!—girl! You must be dreaming."

"I ain't dreaming, miss, indeed! It's a baby, as plain as the nose on my face, and was packed in a hamper just like game. And, oh my! here's the mistress with it, as proud as Punch!"

And, in effect, Mrs. Warner appeared at that moment, bearing a bundle in her arms, with an air of the utmost importance and mystery.

"Jane, it has come! I told *you* so!—and—no, don't come near it, if you please; it is mine, remember! I dug it up, and it is making a terrible noise," which the bundle certainly was, as it rent the air with its screams.

"Oh, mother, let me take it! I think you have got it upside down."

"Jane, I will be obliged to you not to touch it. It is *my* treasure, which I have been digging for, and it belongs to me. I did not think it would cry so much, certainly, but all the same, I found it in the lily-bed, and it is mine."

"Dear, dear, what is all this noise about?" cried Miss Prosser, running up from the kitchen, where she had been making pastry.

"Dear Miss Prosser, the most absurd thing has happened that you ever heard of," replied Jane in a strangely agitated voice. "Mother has found a baby in the lily-bed."

"Are you trying to make a fool of me, Jane?"

"Indeed no. It is the truth. Come and see for yourself. But the absurdity is, that I have been coaxing poor mother to help me in the garden lately, under the pretence that she might find a treasure if she dug deep enough, and she has taken it into her head that *this* is the treasure, and it belongs to her.

"A fine treasure, indeed!" exclaimed Miss Prosser indignantly. "A squalling brat to feed and look after. And whoever can have had the impudence to put such rubbish into *our* garden?"

"A tramp, I suppose," said Jane falteringly; "some poor mother who has no home, and no father for her baby."

"Fiddlesticks, my dear! Don't look at it in that sentimental light. Some thief, more likely, or some abandoned creature who just popped the little wretch here because it was less trouble than chucking it into the river. But how on earth did they get over the wall?"

"There is a broken part by the bed of lilies, Miss Prosser, and the basket with the baby was placed just inside there."

"Very wrong of you to let the wall remain in disrepair, my dear. You see what's come of it. Where is the little animal? Come, Mrs. Warner, let me see what you have got there."

"Indeed, Miss Prosser, I would rather you did not. It concerns no one but me. I found it. Jane promised me I should, if I dug every day. And I am quite sure the lieutenant will approve of what I have done."

"No doubt, but let me see it all the same. You can't keep it smothered in that flannel for ever."

Thus adjured, and having exacted a solemn promise that Miss Prosser should not touch the baby, Mrs. Warner turned down the flannel and displayed the rosy face of a healthy infant of about three months old, which had by this time cried itself to sleep. Jane regarded it with moist eyes, and even Miss Prosser was moved to admiration.

"Well, it's a pretty little thing, whoever it belongs to. And beautifully clean, too. Is there no letter nor paper of directions with it?"

"Nothing, ma'am," replied Caroline, "I've shook out every bit of the hamper it came in, and there was nothing under it but hay."

"And I found it in the bed of lilies by the path where young Ewell used to walk up and down smoking his pipe," interposed Mrs. Warner. "Jane told me if I dug there every day I should be sure to find something. And so I did, you see—Jane is always right—and it is mine, and I won't give it up to anybody."

"Hush, dear mother! You have told us that before!" exclaimed Jane; and then she turned with an apology to Miss Prosser: "You see, when she has once got an idea in her poor head she can't get it out again."

"You should be careful how you put ideas there, then," replied her friend, drily.

"I wonder what we had better do with respect to this poor little one," continued Jane timidly.

"Do, my dear? There's only one thing to be done, and that's to send it to the workhouse. What else *could* you do? You're not thinking of bringing it up as one of the family, are you?" replied Miss Prosser, laughing. "Here, Caroline,

put on your bonnet and run round to the police-station in the next street, and tell the superintendent what has happened, and that he's to send an officer here to take the child away. Be quick, now, or the dinner will not be ready in time."

Mrs. Warner, whose bird-like eyes had been travelling from one face to the other to try and read their meaning, now caught at the words, "take the child away," and commenced to whimper.

"Jane, Jane! don't let them take it away! You know I found it, and you will let me keep it, won't you, for my own? You have often said since Dash died that you would get me another dog, but you never have, and now I would like to keep *this* instead; and they shan't take it away from me, shall they?"

Jane's hand was placed protectingly on the old lady's shoulder at once, as she assured her she should retain her property.

"I do not see the necessity for such violent haste, Miss Prosser," she added. "Let poor mother keep the baby for a few hours, at all events. It will be time enough to send it to the Union when we find it impossible to hear any news of its parents. Don't you think it will be more charitable to keep it here for a little while?"

"No, I don't, Jane, if you ask me the plain question; and what's more, I think you're a fool for proposing it. The longer she has it, the more difficult it will be to get it from her. She's making as much fuss over it now as if it were the Tanjore brooch."

"Poor mother! she has so little interest or enjoyment in this life. I would like to give her a little innocent pleasure if I could. So you go back to your pastry, dear friend, and take Caroline with you, and I will look after mother and the baby."

"Don't leave her alone with it, or she'll throw it on the fire, or sit on it," laughed Miss Prosser, and Jane turned pale at the idea of such a contingency.

Left alone with Mrs. Warner and the little foundling, she became an altered being, and the mother and daughter played together like two children with a doll, as they undressed the infant and bathed and fed it.

It was a little girl — the prettiest little girl, Mrs.

Warner declared, that she had ever seen, and Jane too, as she covered the tiny face and hands with kisses, appeared to have taken a great fancy for the little creature thus unexpectedly thrown upon her care.

"Now, *when* is that child to go to the workhouse?" inquired Miss Prosser after dinner. "You had much better get it taken there before night, for it will keep the whole house awake, and I am not sure that you won't have some trouble about it, if you don't give notice at the police-station at once. They might refuse to take it in, Jane."

Jane, who had been sitting by the fire watching the baby asleep upon some shawls, now came forward and leaned caressingly over Miss Prosser's chair.

"And what," she asked, as her trembling fingers wandered lightly over the other's hair, "what if they *did* refuse? Should we miss *very* much the drop of milk and bread the poor little creature would consume?"

"My dear child, you are mad! It isn't the bread and milk now—that's nothing; but it's the bread and meat, and dresses and schooling, that she'll consume by-and-by. You cannot dream of taking such an unnecessary burthen on yourself, surely."

"Perhaps it would not prove such a burthen as you anticipate, Miss Prosser. Perhaps by-and-by, when poor mother has left me, this little waif may be all my comfort. And if *I* die first, she may prove a second daughter to my mother! And—and—if you did not think it very foolish—I feel as if I *should* like to indulge her in this fancy, since she has so little to make her happy."

"Oh, what I think is of no consequence at all, my dear! The house is your own, and the money is your own; and if you believe you can maintain three people on what has been barely sufficient for two, why, there's an end of it. Only, don't ask my advice again, when you've made up your own mind first, that's all."

"If—if—you are sure you will not be angry, I confess I should like to keep this poor little infant—at least for a while," replied the girl, with some degree of hesitation; "and it shall not disturb you at night—I promise you that—for I will take it to my own room."

"And I am sleeping with your mother in order that you may have undisturbed rest," remarked Miss Prosser grimly.

"I know it, and I thank you for your kindness. But if you knew—if you could only guess—how happy I should feel—how much at rest—how——"

"Say no more, Jane. You have set your heart upon it, so make the experiment. I expect that, in a few days, you'll be very thankful to send Caroline round to the police-station."

Miss Prosser altered her mind, however, before she went to bed that night.

Mrs. Warner (tired from her unusual excitement) retired to rest early, and Jane had taken the sleeping infant from her side and carried it upstairs to her own room. Miss Prosser, entering there an hour later to ask Jane's advice on some trivial domestic matter, came upon a pretty picture. A light was burning on the table, where the milk and other preparations for the night were laid; and on the pillow lay Jane, with the little infant circled by her arm, and a look of ineffable love and peace beaming from her countenance.

Miss Prosser stood breathless. In a moment the truth was revealed to her, and she thought she must have been blind not to have guessed it before. But she said nothing to Jane Warner of her conviction. She only advanced to the bed, and remarked quietly:

"You look very comfortable there, my dear, and the baby seems to have made herself quite at home."

"Yes," replied Jane, in a low tone of happiness, "she is so good. Isn't she pretty, Miss Prosser? Such big eyes, and such a wee, wee nose."

"I suppose you're quite resolved not to send her to the Union, then?"

"Oh, quite, *quite*," said the girl, with bated breath.

"Well, then, you must let me share in some of the labour she will impose upon us. No, do not refuse me, my dear; for the little creature has quite converted me already, and I should be almost as sorry to part with her as you would. I will be her godmother, and you shall call her '*Helen*,' after me—that is, if you have no objection."

"Dear friend," cried Jane rapturously, reaching up to kiss Miss Prosser, "I would rather call her after *you* than any one."

"That is settled, then, and I shall take an extra interest in her on that account. And should she live——"

"Ah! don't say that!" exclaimed Jane, catching the infant to her lips.

"I will take upon myself the charge of educating her, and that will be an expense off your hands, Jane. Well, well, it is a foolish business, but we will say no more about that after to-day. Little Helen shall be the joint property of all three of us, and we will vie with each other in taking proper care of her."

"Oh, thank you—thank you, dear friend! You have made me *so* happy!" cried Jane, as she lay down again, with the little infant cuddled close to her breast.



CHAPTER XX.

QUARRELS.

ROSIE EWELL, having once made up her mind to tell her brother Wilfrid that she would not remain at Lambscote Hall, did not let the grass grow under her feet. She had plenty of resolution for one so young, and her love and pride had been too sorely wounded to admit of her changing her mind. It would have been hard enough to learn that Captain Dorsay never meant to marry her, and that when he spoke of their union as something—although misty and undefined—yet certain to be, he was simply taking advantage of her ignorance and child-like faith. But to have heard him confess with his own lips that he was Lena's lover—to have been compelled to stand by and listen to their shameful recrimination—*that* was the climax of her humiliation. How could she remain in the house after that? How could she accept favours from the hands of the woman who had taken her lover from her, and was deceiving her brother, or run the risk of meeting and speaking to Captain Dorsay again?

No! she must go back to her mother's care; and the difficulty was, how to apprise Wilfrid of her determination without betraying the reason. Nevertheless, it had to be done, and the sooner the better. She refused to appear at dinner that evening, but sent a message to Wilfrid that she wished to see him in her own room instead. Lady Otto glanced at her daughter when the message was delivered, with a look that said, "You have put your foot in it now;" but Sir Wilfrid was quite unconscious there was anything wrong.

"Poor little Rosie!" he exclaimed; "is she ill, Lena?"

"I believe she had a headache this afternoon, but I did not understand it was bad enough to confine her to her room," replied Lady Ewell, with affected indifference.

But as her husband went upstairs, she glanced at Captain Dorsay, and shrugged her shoulders. He—for his part—looked seriously disturbed, and anticipated the very worst consequences from the proposed interview. He need not

have been afraid. The poor girl loved him, for all his villainy, and would have died before she had betrayed his name.

"What's the matter, Rosie?" asked Sir Wilfrid, as he met her. She was still dressed in her walking-attire, with the exception of her hat, and her face was swollen with tears. "Why, you've been crying, child! Is anything wrong? What has occurred to vex you?"

"A great deal is wrong, dear Wilfrid. I am afraid what I have to tell you will annoy you, but I cannot stay at Lambscote."

"*Cannot stay at Lambscote!* I do not understand you. Do you mean that you want a change?"

"No. I want to go away altogether. I cannot live here."

"But, Rosie, this is very serious. Don't you know that Lambscote is to be your home always, unless you marry?"

"I know you meant it to be so, dear. But it is impossible. I must go back to mamma."

"What have you to complain of, child? Haven't I done everything I could to make you comfortable? I am sure I thought that, what with your horse, and your dog, and your long dresses, you were as happy as a queen. Oh, Rosie, you have disappointed me dreadfully, and I cannot permit you to do as you propose."

"But, Wilfrid, you *must*, or I will run away. I *cannot*, and I *will not*, remain here any longer. I know that you have done everything in your power to make me feel at home, and spent a lot of money upon me, and I am very grateful, and love you dearly for it. But I cannot remain in the same house with Lena. And that's the long and the short of it."

"*With Lena*," cried Sir Wilfrid, starting; "with my wife! Why, what on earth can you have to say against her? The sweetest-tempered woman that ever lived—easy, almost to indifference. What *can* my Lena have to do with this sudden freak on your part?"

"She has *everything* to do with it. Ask her yourself, Wilfrid, if you don't believe me. Ask her if she considers it advisable for me to remain at Lambscote. Why, she was the first to propose I should go. We have never got on well together. You must have seen that. I could not feel she was my sister. But now—now, she has said herself she

wishes me to leave. And nothing will induce me to remain."

Sir Wilfrid shaded his face with his hand.

"You shock me very much, Rosie—very much indeed. Why women can never keep friends with one another under the same roof is a mystery to me."

"You would not have kept friends with her yourself if you had heard her this afternoon," exclaimed his sister indignantly. And then, remembering herself, she added, "But naturally you would see things in quite a different light from what I do."

"And so will you, my dear, by to-morrow. Go to bed, and don't talk of it any more, and you will acknowledge you have been hasty in the morning."

"Wilfrid, you must understand me plainly; I refuse to sit down to table with your wife."

"But that is a direct insult both to her and me."

"I cannot help it. I am very sorry it should be so, but it is inevitable. Give me enough money to take me home, dear Wilfrid, and I will never trouble you any more."

She was crying now bitterly, and her tears affected him.

"My darling Rosie, you know how I love you. If this is only a feminine quarrel, make it up with Lena, for my sake. I shall never be so happy again if you go back to Surbiton."

"I *cannot* make it up, Wilfrid. It is not to be made up. Ask your wife if it is. She knows the only conditions under which I will remain in this house. Ask her if she will agree to those conditions. If she says *yes*, I will stay."

"What are the conditions?"

"Lena knows them. They are between her and me. She tried to persuade me to give you a false reason for going, and to say I missed the society of my mother and sisters. But it is not true. I could have been happy living here with *you*, dear Wilfrid, for ever. But I cannot, and I will not, live with Lena," she repeated with passionate energy.

"You mystify me, Rosie," he answered; "I will go and speak to Lena about it at once."

He desired his wife to accompany him to the library, and there demanded an explanation. Lena was quite prepared to answer anything. She had talked it over with Lady Otto, and they had agreed that it was an emergency that presented a wide field for the imaginative faculties.

He gave a great sigh, and sat down and wrote to his mother :

" MY DEAREST MOTHER,—

" I am sorry to tell you that circumstances have arisen here that render it undesirable that Rosie should make her home—as I hoped she would—at Lambcote. The fact is, Lena and she do not get on very well together, and neither of them is happy. I suppose it is often the case with mixed families, but it is none the less disappointing to me. Of course, I should not like my dear little sister to be a loser by my short-sightedness, and therefore I shall allow her two hundred a year until she marries, which will also lessen the burthen upon you. She travels to Surbiton to-morrow morning under safe escort.

" Believe me,

" Your affectionate son,

" WILFRID EWELL."

He carried this letter up to Rosie for her approval, and, as he believed, her consolation, and was surprised to see the girl's face flush crimson with annoyance at its contents.

" This won't do, Wilfrid," she said, as she tore it up. " I will never consent to it. You must write your letter over again."

" To what do you not consent?"

" To your proposal of making me an allowance. It is generous, but I cannot accept it."

" My dear, it is only your due!"

" It is *not* my due! Nothing is my due from Lambcote. The money is half Lena's, as well as the house, and I will take no charity from her hands."

" My dear Rosie, this is carrying your pride to an absurd extent. The property is mine, and I can distribute it as I choose. My wife has nothing to do with the matter."

" All the same, I refuse to be supported by anything from Lambcote. Why should I be? If mamma considers me a burthen I will work for myself. I will accept the money for my journey home, Wilfrid, and if I may take little Nettle, I should like to keep her, for your sake. But nothing more."

" Have it your own way then," replied the brother, with

an air of vexation. "I meant it kindly, you may be sure of that."

"Oh, dear, *dear* Wilfrid! Do you think I doubt it?" cried the girl, throwing her arms round his neck. "But if you really love me, don't speak to me of money any more. If I were to take what you so generously offer me, I should feel more like a traitor than I do for not telling you."

"*What?* Rosie! you do not mean to say you have been deceiving me?"

"No, no! I did not think of what I was saying. I meant that I should feel so mean and despicable. But, dear Wilfrid, don't ask me any more questions to-night. I am quite worn out with the shock of this sudden rupture."

"I am afraid it is one of those things the less talked about the better," said her brother, with a sigh. "Well, Rosie, I will attend to your wishes, and for the present, at least, we will not mention the money subject again. Perhaps—who knows?—a few months, or even weeks, will see this cloud blown over, and we shall all be happy and reunited again."

Rosie shook her head as she busied herself with the packing of her boxes, and the tears she could not control fell upon the articles in her hand.

"I am afraid it is too bad ever to blow over," she replied. "But tell mamma, Wilfrid, that it was not all my fault, although it is irremediable. I feel very much afraid of what mamma may say when she sees me again."



CHAPTER XXI.

RELATIONS.

POOR ROSIE may well have been afraid of what Mrs. Ewell would say on her return to Surbiton. She had been very jealous at first, for her elder daughter's sake, of Sir Wilfrid's decided preference for his youngest sister.

"Why," she would ask plaintively, "was a girl of sixteen to be lapped in luxury and introduced to Society, whilst her dear Edith, and Fanny, and Flora, and Mary, were hidden away in a suburban town, far from all chances of matrimony?"

But after a while she had become reconciled to the idea. Her son was not a man to be easily influenced, and he had set his heart upon adopting Rosie, and only Rosie. Therefore Mrs. Ewell let Rosie go, and once gone, found the diminution in her baker's and butcher's bills even a thing to be grateful for. The sisters came in, too, for Rosie's share of ribbons and laces, and agreed that, since Wilfrid was so obstinate, the next best thing to living at Lambcote was having a few more indulgences at home. So the family had settled down into rather a different mode of living, and by the time the youngest daughter of the house returned to it, had quite made up their minds that she was disposed of, as far as *they* were concerned, for ever. Mrs. Ewell, indeed, would not believe it possible that she intended to do more than pay them a short visit, and even that, she signified, was inconvenient.

When Rosie ran into her sitting-room, half laughing and half crying, and, embracing them all round, told them she had come back to live with them again, her mother's look of dismay was anything but encouraging.

"What do you say, my dear?" she inquired, as soon as the kissing had somewhat subsided. "That you have come to stay with us? But you should have written first, Rosie. Since you have made your home at Lambcote our household arrangements are somewhat altered. It was very thoughtless of Wilfrid to send you here without any preparation."

"He couldn't help it, mamma. It is not his fault. I came

away in such a hurry, he had no time to let you know. But he has written to explain matters. I have the letter in my bag."

"But what is the reason of your return, my dear? I trust it is not the fear of infection? Surely, if any fever has broken out at the Hall your brother would not be so inconsiderate as to run the risk of your communicating it to your sisters?"

"No, no, mamma; nothing of the sort. You do not understand. But let me give you Wilfrid's letter—that will explain everything."

She extracted the letter from her hand-bag and gave it to Mrs. Ewell, and tried to talk easily to her sisters whilst it was undergoing the process of inspection, although she was trembling with agitation to hear her mother's verdict on it. At last it came.

"I am quite at a loss to understand your brother's explanation," said Mrs. Ewell, after a second perusal. "He says that you and Lena do not get on well together. But how is that to be rectified by your visiting us? Since your home for life is to be at Lambscote, the sooner you learn to get on with your sister-in-law, I should say, the better."

"But, mamma, it is a far more serious matter than you suppose. Lena and I have parted for ever. There is no making up our quarrel, and I never intend to go back to the Hall again."

Mrs. Ewell began to scent danger now, and became proportionately angry.

"*No making up your quarrel?* Do I hear you aright, Rosie? Do I hear a child of mine, who has been reared in Christian principles and a spirit of forbearance for all mankind, say there is no making up her quarrel? I am ashamed of you! Had I known you were coming home with such sentiments as those in your mouth, I would have turned you from the very door."

"Oh, mamma! pray don't talk to me like that until you have heard all. Lena has never liked me. She has never been kind to me from the beginning, and lately she has been worse. In fact, it has been too bad for anyone to bear. She has insulted me, and told me she wished I would leave Lambscote, and therefore I cannot stay. *I will not stay!* Wilfrid wished me to do so, but I told him it was impossible."

"And what do you intend to do then? What plans have you formed?" demanded her mother coldly.

The girl looked up with frightened eyes.

"What plans, mamma? How could I have any plans except to come back to you, and take my old place at home?"

"But this is no longer your home, Rose. You seem to forget that. When your brother—greatly against my wishes—chose to offer you a home at Lambcote, instead of one of your elder sisters, I told him it must be for a permanency, and he agreed to it. Indeed, he urged it. He said he should consider you as his ward, and provide for you entirely in the future. Finding he was determined, I gave my consent, and washed my hands of all responsibility concerning you from that moment."

"But mamma, if I can't come home to you, where can I go?" exclaimed Rosie, in tears.

"It is Wilfrid's duty to answer that question, my dear. If he turns you out of Lambcote, he must provide a home for you elsewhere."

"But he didn't *turn me out*—far from it. He urged me to remain; but I cannot, mamma. You must see it is impossible. How *could* I continue to live on his bounty, when his wife insults me to my very face?"

"It is very strange to me to hear a child of your age talking of *insult*, Rosie. How did Lady Ewell insult you? What was the insult about?"

The girl crimsoned. "I cannot tell you, mamma."

"You cannot tell your *mother*?"

"No, not even my mother. It was a matter quite private between her and me, the repetition of which can do no good, and might do much harm. You will not ask me again, I am sure, mamma. I would not tell it even to Wilfrid."

"A mother and a brother are two very different things," sniffed Mrs. Ewell. "You can tell *me* what it would be impossible perhaps to tell *him*."

"Not in this case, mamma, because it concerns his wife more than it does me. Oh, mamma, Lena has an evil temper! You don't know her, and no more does Wilfrid. I could not live under his roof without telling him what she is, and that would only make him still more unhappy."

"Do you mean to insinuate that your brother *is* unhappy? I do not believe it; neither can a child like you be any judge."

"I do not think that he is happy," replied Rosie simply.

"And what do you expect me to do?" inquired Mrs. Ewell after a pause.

"You must let me stay here, mamma. You must take me back again. I am very sorry it should be so, but I can never—under any circumstances—return to Lambcote Hall."

"Well, you must remain here, at all events, until I have communicated with your brother, and learned the rights and wrongs of this mysterious affair. But it is excessively inconvenient. I sold your bed—having no further use for it—directly you left us. Edith, dear, could you manage to take Rose into yours for a night or two, until I have settled this matter with Wilfrid?"

"Yes, mamma, we will contrive to put her up somewhere," replied the sisters, who were rather glad to have Rosie back with them for a few days, and hear the tittle-tattle and gossip of Lambcote.

But the poor child had been rendered very despondent by her chilling reception, and was in no mood for funny descriptions or mirth provoking anecdotes. And as the days passed on the situation became worse instead of better.

Mrs. Ewell's correspondence with her son was not at all satisfactory. Sir Wilfrid could only repeat to his mother what he had said to Rosie—that the quarrel between Lena and her had caused him much unhappiness, and he wished it could be made up again. His wife refused to make any advances in the matter, which he thought only befitting her superior age and position; but, he suggested—unfortunately—he thought that if Rosie could bring herself to ask Lena's pardon, the difference might be settled between them. And his sister might depend, he added, that if she returned to Lambcote, he would see that she never met Lena, unless she desired it, except at meals.

Armed with this assurance, Mrs. Ewell sought her daughter, and told her to pack up her things and return to the Hall at once. Nothing could be more satisfactory, she affirmed, than her brother's offer, and it was as much as anyone could expect to receive. It was not likely that Lady Ewell would stoop to ask pardon of a child of her age; it was Rosie's duty to apologize to *her*, and she commanded her, as a mother, to do her duty at once.

But Rosie was resolute.

"Have I not told you, mamma, that Wilfrid does not know, nor ever will know, the cause of my quarrel with Lena? It is too shocking and disgusting to be repeated! If you must have the truth, there it is. And as for asking her pardon, I will never do it. I have done nothing wrong. It is *she* only who has forgotten that she is a lady—or a woman! And I will never, *never* speak to her again. Pray—pray, mamma, do not urge me to it, for you are breaking my heart!"

And indeed the poor child's heart seemed in a fair way to be broken at that period, so constantly was she assailed by her mother and sisters with sneers, and doubts, and reproaches for her selfishness in coming back as a burden upon them.

Mrs. Ewell, however, finding it impossible to effect a reconciliation between her daughter and her daughter-in-law, determined to find out the cause of so extraordinary and determined an antagonism between the two young women.

She was full of curiosity on this point, and rather disposed to fancy Rosie in the wrong; and so one day, learning accidentally that Lady Otto St. Blase was in town, she set off to pay her a visit, without apprising the household of her intention.

Lady Otto and Mrs. Ewell had been schoolfellows in olden times, and always considered themselves intimate friends, and a marriage between their children had naturally drawn the bond still closer. The curate's widow had, therefore, no hesitation in laying her mind bare to Lady Otto; and Lady Otto, schooled by her daughter, and anxious at all risks to shield her reputation, was quite ready to answer the questions put to her.

After having detailed all the inconvenience and disappointment she had felt at receiving Rosie home again, Mrs. Ewell begged her friend to tell her the cause of the rupture.

"For, sorry as I am to say it," she went on flatteringly, "I *must* think the fault to be on Rosie's side. I cannot believe that your sweet Lena could be guilty of insulting anyone, especially her husband's sister. But poor Rose has been sadly spoilt by Wilfrid; and that fact, joined to a naturally obstinate temperament (so like her poor papa), renders her rather difficult to manage. Now, cannot you enlighten me a little on this very painful subject?"

"You shall know all that *I* do, my dear friend," said Lady Otto sympathetically; "but, remember, I repeat it in the strictest confidence. My dear Lena is an only child, you know, and she can keep nothing from her mother. She came to me with the story at once, in the most open and ingenuous manner. I dare say she was a little to blame. She is not *quite* perfection; but your dear girl gave her the utmost provocation."

"I was afraid of it—do tell me how."

"Well, Lena is very particular, you see—perhaps too much so, she was brought up so completely at my side—and your dear girl is very young and thoughtless, and Lena felt it her duty to speak to her concerning her behaviour with a certain gentleman in the neighbourhood."

"Oh, dear Lady Otto, you frighten me! Her behaviour with a gentleman?"

"Now remember, Mrs. Ewell, I speak in the strictest confidence! Unless you give me your promise not to mention our conversation to Lena or Sir Wilfrid, I cannot proceed."

"You have my word—my sacred word."

"Very good, then. It seems my Lena had noticed and disapproved of your Rosie's conduct for some weeks past, when one afternoon, as she was taking a walk in the park, she came upon her with the gentleman in question all alone, and he was, in fact, *kissing her*."

"Oh! my dear friend, is it possible?"

"You will not blame our Lena too much, dear Mrs. Ewell, if she felt angry, especially with *him*, and accused him openly of treachery, in making love to so young a girl without the sanction of her guardians. Especially as she knows (and I know too) that the gentleman is not a marrying man, and could never have meant any good by his attentions to our poor Rosie! Well, this was the cause of the quarrel. My Lena was terribly agitated as she related it to me, for it seems that Rosie was so angry at her interference that she called her all sorts of cruel names, and declared she would never speak to her again. And the next morning, to our horror, we heard that she had left the Hall."

"But the name of the man who dared to trifle with my poor child!" exclaimed Mrs. Ewell, her maternal feelings for the moment in the ascendant.

"That I must not tell you, my dear friend. It would

enter the Lord's house with a quiet and unperturbed spirit. You can employ the time of my absence in packing your boxes, for if Wilfrid does not send an immediate answer to my letter, I shall probably take you back to Somersetshire myself."

She sailed from the room as she spoke, leaving Rosie in a state of the utmost distress ; not so much because she was thrust out of her mother's house, as because she was threatened with a return to the presence of the woman she despised, and the man she had not yet learned to hate. Left to herself, she proceeded to execute the task allotted her, and repack the boxes she had so lately brought there. But as she did so, the determination grew stronger and stronger within her that they should never travel back to Somersetshire. Her mother had disowned her, and she had no home. She might not remain in Surbiton. She was considered unfit company for her sisters. There was but one course open to her—to work for her living, and be dependent upon no one. But what to do, where to go—to whom to fly in her desolation and distress? Who would advise and assist her? As these questions revolved in the poor girl's mind, something in her heart seemed to answer, "*Jane Warner*." Jane Warner, with the sad sweet eyes that seemed to have known so much trouble—with the kind smile and the warm womanly embrace. The more she thought of her, the more Rosie believed that Heaven had brought that remembrance to her mind. Somehow she felt *sure* that Jane would be a friend to her, and show her how she could work and support herself. But would they come and take her away again? Would her mother bear down upon the quiet cottage at Chelsea, and insist upon dragging her thence to Somersetshire?

But here a bright idea struck Rosie. None of the Ewells knew the Warners, except Wilfrid and herself, and Wilfrid had so little intention of visiting Chelsea again, that he had even ordered her not to mention Jane's name in his presence. She would be safe there, if no one knew the secret of her destination. And no one *should* know it. The notion had come like an inspiration to her, and she acted on it at once. She hastily scribbled and addressed a note to a name she had never heard of, and sent the maid of all work off on a fruitless errand to the other end of Surbiton to find a person and a place that did not exist there.

As soon as she was safely out of sight, Rosie dressed herself and called a cab, and had her boxes placed upon it. And then she slammed the hall-door of the empty villa, and drove to the railway station, and was in London long before the church-goers had returned from their evening sacrifice, and were standing on the steps of their domicile, ringing and knocking in vain for admittance. As she was carried to town, Rosie Ewell was sharp enough to secure herself against an ignominious capture. When she had asked her brother Wilfrid for her railway fare, he had put ten pounds into her little purse, so that she had sufficient funds, at least for her immediate requirements. As soon as she arrived at the London station, she left her boxes in the luggage-room and took an omnibus to Chelsea, so as to leave no traces of her destination as she went.

When Mrs. Ewell and her daughters had stood for nearly an hour trying to gain an entry to their home, the servant-girl returned, blowing and panting, to tell them that "she couldn't find no Mrs. Jacobs in that part of the town, and the pleeceman said there wasn't no one living near there in that name."

Her mistress's indignation on hearing that the girl had been sent on a wild-goose chase by her youngest daughter was only equalled by her indignation, not unmixed with fear, when she entered the house and found all traces of that youngest daughter gone.

She knew that she had been very harsh with Rosie, and had allowed her feelings of disappointment and her dread of expenditure full vent when arguing for her return to her brother. But she had not expected her to take a mother's counsel in this fashion. She had little thought she would be so headstrong as to leave her protection without even bidding her farewell.

Mrs. Ewell's letter to Sir Wilfrid, written that evening, was very different from what she had intended it to be. She had the sad news to communicate to him that Rosie, resenting her kindly admonitions and advice, had actually *run away*, no one knew where or *with whom*. Mrs. Ewell underlined the last words, having a strong suspicion herself that the gentleman mysteriously alluded to by Lady Otto must have followed her daughter to Surbiton and then eloped with her. But she did not say so.

The receipt of this letter brought Sir Wilfrid up from Somersetshire by the next train. He was dreadfully distressed about his little sister, and accused both his wife and his mother-in-law of having co-operated in making her dissatisfied with her home. He made every inquiry possible, and succeeded in tracing her as far as Waterloo. But there his discoveries ceased. Boxes left in the luggage-rooms of railway stations tell no tales to any but those who deposited them there, and no cab on the rank confessed to having carried a young lady of Rosie's description on the night in question.

Strangely enough, it never entered Wilfrid's head to think his sister had gone to the Warners. In the first place, he never thought of them unless it were absolutely necessary, nor went within a mile of their abode. In the second, he would not have believed it possible, even had the notion struck him, that Rosie, having spent but a few hours at Wolsey Cottage, would turn to it as a refuge in her hour of distress.

He put some mysteriously worded advertisements in the daily papers, which never caught his sister's eye, and he consulted Mr. Parfitt on the subject. But that worthy gave him little consolation, except by screwing up his mouth and shaking his head, and saying he thought it *very* unlikely the young lady had left home alone. And a few lines that reached Sir Wilfrid in Rosie's hand about a month afterwards seemed to further Mr. Parfitt's idea. They were posted from some remote place in Wales, where she took care to tell him she had never been, and were merely to the effect that he was not to worry himself about her, as she was quite well and happy, and with some one whom she loved dearly, and who took every care of her.

Sir Wilfrid's mind was somewhat relieved by the reception of this letter, but he felt that so much of the sunshine of his life had evaporated with his little sister, that he made many journeys up to London for the sole purpose of wandering about the streets, in the distant hope of running up against her. But it was many, many months before he did so.

CHAPTER XXII.

SISTERS.

WITH the blooming of the June roses and the advent of the little foundling in the lily-bed, Jane Warner's health and spirits visibly improved. She did not sing, nor laugh aloud—she had never been a merry girl at the best of times—but she smiled far oftener than she had done before, and went about her work with cheerful alacrity. The garden came in, too, for a share of her old attention. She took renewed interest in the budding and fading of each rose, and thinned her seedlings, and struck her slips, as she had been wont to do. But her keenest pleasure lay in her attendance on the adopted baby. She spent all her spare moments in working for it, or watching it, and was never so happy as when pacing up and down the old-world garden with little Nellie in her arms.

The infant, who had been christened "Helen Mary," after Miss Prosser and Mrs. Warner, was almost as great a favourite with one as with the other. It was touching to see the delight afforded to the old lady by the care of this little child. She was never so little troublesome as when she was permitted to nurse it, and she would sit silent for hours watching it in its sleep. It seemed in some miraculous manner to have brought back her youth to her, and she fancied herself once more a young mother with her first-born. She would even have presented it with her most precious possession—the Tanjore brooch—had not Jane suggested that it wasn't a safe plaything. The only difference, indeed, that her daughter had with her on the subject was when Mrs. Warner would insist upon trying to stuff little Nellie with cakes and other food unsuited to her age. The old lady could be very grand when interfered with on such occasions, and ask Jane where she had attained her knowledge about children.

"Really, it is too ridiculous," she would exclaim, shaking her cap ribbons like a ruffled hen, "that I should live to be instructed by *my daughter* on such a point. You seem to forget, Jane, that I am a married woman, and the mother of

this dear baby. My husband—who is a lieutenant in the Royal Navy—would be vastly amused if he heard that you considered me incapable of taking care of my own child. And it is very unkind of you, Jane, and not as you should behave to your poor mother, to find fault with me because I cannot bear to see this poor little creature starved to death."

Thus—mingling the past with the present, and the true with the ideal—she would be sorely upset, until her daughter locked all the cakes and jam away, and made her happy by laying the infant in her arms.

Miss Prosser too—who had seen too much of children during her laborious lifetime to care as a rule for their society—made a great pet of little Nellie. Baby's prettiest frocks and ribbons were presents from her godmamma, who could not bear to see the child otherwise than well dressed. She did not take any part in the nursing, it is true, and there was something goblin-like in the look of Miss Prosser's eyes behind her spectacles that always made little Nellie rather shy of her; but she did more than her share of helping to maintain the little orphan that had been thrown upon them for support.

So the time rolled on with the inmates of Wolsey Cottage contentedly, if not mirthfully; and the baby gained strength and vigour every day. These events, which take but a few minutes to read of, occupied weeks in their accomplishment, and it was July before Rosie Ewell found her way to Chelsea.

Jane was walking up and down the lawn one evening, putting little Nellie to sleep in the soft summer air, when the maid, Caroline, came to say a young lady wished to see her.

"A young lady, Caroline? What is it for? Does she want any rooms?—because we have none vacant."

"I don't know, miss. She didn't say. Only she asked for you particular."

"*For me!*" said Jane, with knitted brows. "Are you *sure* she asked for me? Not for Miss Prosser?"

"Oh no, miss! She said, 'Miss Warner' as plain as possible."

"Where have you shown her?"

"Into the mistress's parlour. The mistress has gone out with Miss Prosser."

"Very good. Take baby, Caroline, and I will go and speak to her."

She placed the infant, with a kiss, in the servant's arms, and walked slowly to the parlour. As she entered it, Rose Ewell confronted her.

At first, Jane thought Sir Wilfrid must be ill or dying, and had sent for her, and all the blood forsook her cheek. She grasped the back of a chair with her hands to steady herself, and asked faintly :

"What is it? What do you want?"

Rosie's expectations were chilled by this reception.

"Oh, Miss Warner! have I done wrong in coming to you? But I am so wretched—so unhappy—and I thought you would be my friend."

"Unhappy, Miss Ewell! And you have come from——"

"From Surbiton—from my mother's. She has turned me out of her house, and I am going to earn my own living. And I came to you, for I thought you would help me."

"And—and Sir Wilfrid?" stammered Jane.

"He is at Lambcote. He does not know I am here. No one knows it except you. I ran away whilst they were all at church. And oh, Jane! don't send me from you till you have heard my story."

There was no need for that appeal. Directly Jane understood the girl was in distress and in want of a friend, all her womanly sympathies went out towards her.

"Send you from me, Miss Ewell! How can you think of such a thing? You are welcome to stay here as long as you like. I was only wondering whether any members of your family would follow you here."

"They cannot. They have not even heard me mention your name. But I have never forgotten you, Miss Warner, and when I felt I so much wanted a friend, I thought of you at once, and believed somehow that you would not refuse to befriend me."

"You believed rightly, Miss Ewell, and I am very glad you thought of coming to my care. But let me ask you one thing. Do you wish it to be known that you are here?"

"No, no! I want to hide myself away from all of them. When you have heard my story, Jane, if you say I am wrong, I promise you I will act by your advice. But keep my secret until then."

"Then, my dear—if you will forgive my calling you so—"

"Oh, please call me so, or Rosie, or anything you like. I cannot be 'Miss Ewell' to you."

"Then it will be safer for you to take another name. Your—your brother was so well known in this house, and we have a friend—a very dear, good friend—but rather inquisitive, and if she hears you are Sir Wilfrid's sister, she will never rest until she has found out the reason for your coming here."

"What shall I call myself? Decide for me, Jane."

"Any name will do that is not noticeable. Shall we say 'Miss Fraser?' My mother and Miss Prosser will be home shortly, and we had better decide before they come."

"Yes; Fraser will do as well as any other name, and I will not forget that I am Rosie Fraser."

"Then come upstairs with me and lay aside your walking things, and Caroline shall get you some tea."

"But you have not heard my story yet. I had better tell you first, for fear you should say I am all wrong."

Jane stopped on her way to the staircase, and regarded Rosie with her clear, steadfast eyes.

"Right or wrong, dear," she answered, "can make no difference to me. You are here, and you must take food and rest, whether you stay or go away again. If you will share my room to-night, you shall tell me everything, and we will consult together as to the best way out of your trouble. And if we can find no cure, we will try and bear it together."

She held out her hand as she spoke, but Rosie sprang into her arms instead, and wept upon her bosom. And then Jane drew her upstairs, and refused to hear another word until she had rested and refreshed herself. Caroline, being summoned to receive orders for the evening meal, placed the sleeping infant in Jane's arms.

"A baby!" cried Rosie, who was occupied at the mirror. "Whose is it, Jane. Where did it come from? Oh, what a sweet little thing!"

"It is an adopted child of my mother's," replied Jane, with a heightened colour. "She does not know who its parents are. But we all love it as well as if it really belonged to us."

"I don't wonder at it—I never saw such a pretty baby! and now it is opening its eyes. What large eyes, Jane! and

grey, like mine. Oh, you darling! I shall love you, too. What is its name?"

"She is a little girl, and we call her Nellie; but her real name is Helen Mary."

"Dear little Nellie! May I kiss her? And if I stay here, Jane, may I take care of her as well as you?"

"We are always glad of assistance," replied Jane, laughing, as she placed the infant in the cradle.

When they re-entered the sitting-room they found that Mrs. Warner and Miss Prosser had already returned; and the former, who had only had a glimpse of Rosie when she visited the cottage previously, had entirely forgotten her. Jane walked into the parlour with her, hand-in-hand, saying frankly—

"Mother, dear, here is Rose Fraser come to spend a few days with us. Miss Prosser, this is a young friend of mine, whom you must make welcome."

"Any friend of yours, my dear Jane, must be welcome. Pray be seated, Miss Fraser. It is a warm evening, is it not? And how is baby, Jane? Was she long in getting off to sleep, to-night?"

"No, you good godmamma. She was not the least trouble. And when Miss Fraser arrived she went to Caroline as good as gold. I think she is getting quite fond of Caroline."

"Miss Fraser's arrival was very unexpected," remarked Miss Prosser.

"And all the more delightful," interposed Jane heartily; "we want something to stir us up occasionally in this dull old cottage."

"I am so afraid I shall put Jane to inconvenience," said Rose, blushing.

"Not at all, dear; I am charmed to have you. And now, please make a good supper, or I shall think you don't believe me."

Mrs. Warner, busily engaged in discussing her meal, did not evince the least curiosity on the subject of Rosie's sudden appearance in the midst of their domestic circle. But Jane saw that Miss Prosser thought it strange there had been no premonitory symptoms of such an event, or that she was not further enlightened upon it now, and was thankful when the supper was concluded and she had a fair pretext for withdrawing with her friend.

"Come, Rosie," she said; "if you are ready for bed, so am I; for I have been working hard all day."

Rosie stood up at once, and advanced to shake hands with Miss Prosser.

"You stay here to-morrow?" said that lady interrogatively.

"Certainly," cried Jane; "and I hope for many to-morrows after that. Come, mother, say good-night to Rosie Fraser."

And with an embrace for both the elder ladies, the two girls went upstairs together.

But, shut in the seclusion of the bed-room, Jane's mood underwent a singular alteration. She seemed as if she wished to postpone the explanation, to hear which she had retired so early. She busied herself in procuring all that Rosie would require for the night, but she gave her no encouragement to begin her story. She went and leant over the baby's bassinette, and gazed at its calm, sleeping face, with tears upon her own; and the longer she put off hearing the name which she knew she must infallibly listen to, the greater coward she became. At last Rosie helped her out of the difficulty.

"I am ready to get into bed now," she said timidly; "but I cannot sleep, Jane, till I have told you the circumstances that brought me here. Will you hear them? Shall I tire and worry you if I tell you all before we go to rest to-night?"

"No, no!" replied Jane, turning from the cradle, and seating herself in an arm-chair; "tell me everything, my dear, just as it has happened, and I will try and advise you for the best."

Rosie took possession of a foot-stool, and flung her arms across Jane Warner's knee.

"It is a very dreadful story, Jane, and I hardly know in what words to tell it you. Yet I feel I *must*. I have repeated it to no one else—not Wilfrid even, nor mamma—because it might injure Lena with those who are obliged to live with her. But as you never will know her—and if you did I feel you would keep my secret—I have less hesitation in confiding it to you."

"I will faithfully guard any secret of your *own* that you confide to me, Miss Ewell; but don't tell me those of anybody else."

"Why do you say *Miss Ewell*?" exclaimed Rosie. "I cannot go on unless you call me by my familiar name."

"Rosie then—*dear* Rosie, if you will—don't tell me any secrets but your own."

"But she, Lena, said it openly before me."

"Who is Lena?"

"Wilfrid's wife—don't you know? Ah! I forgot you were not at the wedding. Well, she is a horrible woman—quite horrible!"

"Doesn't she make him happy?" asked Jane in a trembling voice.

"I don't think so. How could she, with her evil temper and her cold sarcastic looks? And she is false too—terribly false. Oh, Jane, she has spoilt all my life! I shall never have any happiness in it any more!"

And Rosie laid her head down on Jane Warner's knee and began to cry.

Jane forgot her own trouble in a moment; all her thought was for the weeping girl.

"My dear, *dear* Rosie, is it possible? But how could she injure you? Is it with—with your brother?"

"Oh, no! Wilfrid loves me dearly, I believe, and would not listen to any tales against me. But there was a man—a man," she went on, catching her sobbing breath, "who stayed at Lambcote, and was—was very fond of me, and I—I—loved him like my life," said Rosie, with another burst of tears."

"And did *she* come between you?" asked Jane, with quick intuition. "But how *could* she—a married woman—? Oh, Rosie, she cannot be as bad as that."

"She is quite as bad as that, Jane. I believe there is nothing too bad for her to do. She met us one day walking in the park, and called me dreadful names, and when I told her, he—he—was going to marry me, she said he couldn't, that he had been her lover for years, and was so still, and that since her marriage to Wilfrid he had written her letters to say so."

"Oh, Rosie! she must be a dreadful woman. How could she confess anything so shameful?"

"She said more than that, Jane. She said no woman should take him from her, and that she knew a secret of his that

would ruin him, and she made him tell me right to my face that he never meant to marry me at all."

Jane listened now, with covered eyes, in silence.

"I know you will say he must be a bad man and not worth crying for," continued Rosie. "But you know, Jane, that you can't leave off loving a person all at once because you find out that he is not worthy."

"Yes, dear, I know," answered the other, with a pressure of the hand.

"And then she told me I must leave Lambscote, and what could I do? I could not have stayed there with Lena and—and—that man."

"No, no!" cried Jane warmly. "It was impossible."

"And be a traitor to poor Wilfrid, eating his bread and letting him be deceived under his very eyes. So I went home to my mother, and she wouldn't let me remain with her, Jane. She heard some garbled account of this story from Lady Otto—that's Lena's mother—and said I was not fit to live with my sisters, and she should take me back to Lambscote Hall and make me beg Lena's pardon. And that I will never do," said Rosie determinately. "I will *not* beg Lena's pardon, nor will I betray her to Wilfrid. And so there is but one course left open to me—to earn my own living; and I came to you, Jane, to ask if you can help me. I have no claim on you, dear, except your past kindness to my brother. But I felt somehow as if you would be my friend."

"You felt right, dear. I will be as good a friend to you as is in my power. But this gentleman you speak of, are you *sure* he will not follow you down here?"

"How can he, Jane? He does not know your name."

"But—but—Sir Wilfrid?" said Jane in a low voice.

"Oh no, *he* will not come. I do not know why, but he will not let me mention you before him now. What is the reason, Jane? Is he angry with you? Have you quarrelled?"

"No, not exactly; but there is a coolness. Don't question me about it, Rosie, for I can tell you no more. But if your story is true—as I have no doubt it is—and you have no home either at Lambscote or Surbiton, why, look upon this as your home, dear, until you find a better."

"And you will show me how to support myself, that I may be no burden on you, Jane?"

"We will look for work together until we find it. And you will regard yourself as one of us, and not be impatient if it seems long in coming?"

"Oh, Jane, Jane! how good you are! How I wish you were my sister."

"Believe I am your sister then, dear. Think of me and confide in me as much."

"I will indeed. I have told no one else the story I have told you now."

"It is a very miserable story. Let us hope it may go no further, and let us try and forget it from to-night."

"And Jane," cried Rosie, "will you teach me—you, who seem to know everything—how to forget also my unhappy love for—for—*him*?"

The face of the elder girl quivered.

"I cannot promise to do *that*, Rosie, because I don't know the way myself. But if it is any comfort to you to know that I understand your grief and feel for it, you may rest assured I do. I too have suffered, dear, God knows, and my fullest sympathy is yours. We will help each other, Rosie. We will give ourselves no time for idle thought and useless tears, and when we have a little leisure, we will speak of higher and better things than earthly disappointment, until we lose sight of it in the hope of a future. Shall we be sisters from this hour, dear? sisters in the true acceptation of the word, bound together by our hearts, though not by ties of nature? Is it a bargain? Shall we shake hands now, and pledge ourselves to mutual support by sympathy and affection and assistance?"

But Rosie answered her by falling on her neck.

"Oh, my sister, my dear, *dear* sister!" she cried. "The help came to me when I first heard the reassuring sound of your kind voice."

And the two girls lay down to sleep that night cradled in each other's arms.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WORK.

To see the contentment that beamed in Jane Warner's face the following morning, when she waked up and found it was not a dream, but that Wilfrid's sister was really thrown on her protection and, perhaps, support, one would have thought that she had gained a fortune, instead of having taken on herself an extra burden. But the idea of possible expense to herself as the result of this new companionship never troubled for one moment the generous-hearted woman.

Surely the bread and meat that Rosie would consume could make but small difference in the weekly bills, and if it did, what then? It would only be a little more work for herself—a little less leisure and amusement—and, if the worst came to the worst, she could dismiss Caroline, and do the cooking by herself. Anything, sooner than turn her friendless sister—so much more her sister than Rosie dreamed of—upon the world, to fall into want, and perhaps evil.

The girls arranged it all between themselves as they made their toilets. Time is short to the young, and nothing appears a difficulty. Rosie and Jane had found the work, in their imaginations, and settled down to it, and were already two old women living together to the end of their lives, with no more exciting nor disappointing love than that they gave each other before they came down to breakfast to astonish the *real* old people with their news.

To Miss Prosser the idea of this Miss Fraser, whom she had never seen till the night before, remaining at Wolsey Cottage, to make one of the family, was very unpalatable indeed. She did not offer any remark upon it before Rosie, but she turned on Jane directly they were left alone.

As breakfast was concluded, Jane brought little Nellie, and laid her in Mrs. Warner's arms to be carried out into the garden, and Rosie pleaded to be allotted some task also.

"You know you have promised I shall help you, Jane, just as if I were your sister, so now, what can I do? May I wash up the breakfast things?—I will be very careful.

Or is there any needlework on hand for baby or yourself?"

"No, dear Rosie! not this morning. All is so new and strange to both of us. Give me time to think! and then, if you do not find more profitable employment, I promise you shall take your share of the day's labour. At this moment you could not help me better than by going in the garden with poor mother, and seeing that she takes proper care of baby. She is so apt," concluded Jane, with a cheerful laugh, "to put her down upon the grass, or leave her on a bench, whilst she goes after a butterfly or comes trotting back to the house to ask when dinner will be ready, that I am always in a fidget when those two are out together."

"I will go at once and look after them both," cried Rosie, as she kissed Jane and ran out of the back-door.

Miss Prosser had watched their proceedings, and listened to their words with a face carved in marble, and as Rosie disappeared, she inquired grimly:

"And pray, how long is your friend likely to stay with us, Jane?"

"*How long?*" echoed Jane. "I am sure I don't know. For ever, perhaps, and I hope it may be so. That is—I hope she will live with us, till she finds a better home, for the poor child has no other at present."

"That seems strange. Is she an orphan?"

"She is—or worse. She has no friends but us to go to."

"Very sad! But you have not known her long. She can hardly expect you to support her."

"I have known her too long to refuse her the shelter of my roof whilst I have one, Miss Prosser. I—I—have received benefits from some of her friends in days gone by, and would like to repay them now."

"I thought you said she *had* no friends."

"None who can receive her. A young girl cannot live with anyone."

"True. But you are a strange protectress for her to fix upon. Does she know how poor you are?—that you live from hand to mouth, and depend on the letting of your rooms to provide your mother and that helpless infant with bread?"

"Oh, Miss Prosser! Rosie will not live on me or anyone. She is far too considerate and high-spirited for that. She

came to me to help her to find work by which to support herself."

"What can she do?"

"I do not know. We have not discussed the subject yet; but she has been educated like a lady. There is plenty of time to think about it. We shall talk it over together, and decide on what is most suitable."

"And supposing she proves to be unfit for anything?" continued Miss Prosser, in the same unpleasant voice. "A lady's education is all very well in its way, but it does not provide talent or even capability to earn a living. And Miss Fraser does not look clever to me."

Jane was regularly vexed. Miss Prosser's remarks had already irritated her, making her fear, as they did, that she might be betrayed into telling more of Rosie's secret than she wished to do. And now her apparent unkindness irritated her still more. What right had she, so Jane's heart argued, to interfere in the matter at all? The house was not hers, nor the money. And if anyone suffered from the introduction of a new inmate to the cottage, it would not be Miss Prosser. Jane said something to this effect, though not so plainly, for she had received much kindness at the old lady's hands of late. But Miss Prosser understood what she meant.

"And now I've made you angry," she said, "and I didn't mean it, Jane. Only you are so heedless, my dear. You take responsibilities on your shoulders as if you were a rich woman, without any thought of the trouble they may bring. See how you picked up that baby out of the lily bed, and adopted it without making a single inquiry on the subject. And now you will adopt this Miss Fraser in the same manner, I suppose, and work for them both. It is not doing yourself justice, my dear. It is not, indeed."

"So long as we have enough to eat and drink, what does it signify?" said Jane.

"And when you want to marry, what then? It is not every young man, my dear, who would like to commence life with a family ready made."

"I shall *never* marry, Miss Prosser," replied the girl, in a low voice.

"That's how it may be, Jane. I've heard many a woman say the same thing, and live to laugh at it. But if you

do not, all the more reason to avoid burthening yourself in this fashion. You will have enough to do to keep yourself."

"I cannot look on Rosie as a burthen. I love her like a sister. She wishes to live with me, and we mean to work for each other, and have but one purse between us. And if *one* cannot work, the other will."

"Let us come back to the main point, then. What do you think Miss Rosie can do? For I see that the best way to help you will be to help her. You are very positive when you have made up your mind, Jane."

"Ah, my dear friend! Now your kind heart is asserting itself! You will advise us, will you not? You see so much more of young ladies, and know so much more of their capabilities than I do."

"I can certainly advise you, my dear. Advice is a cheap gift—so cheap that few people consider it worth their acceptance. But had not we better summon Miss Fraser to the consultation?"

Jane called Rosie in from the garden, and Miss Prosser put her through a catechism respecting her accomplishments. The result was not very satisfactory. Poor Rosie, like the generality of her sex, confessed to playing a little, and singing a little, and drawing a little. But to no one single art had her study been directed in a measure to make it useful. Yet, when Miss Prosser suggested the only occupations for which she considered her fit, Jane Warner would not hear of her undertaking them.

"Humph!" said the elder lady reflectively; "perhaps she might do for a nursery governess. The pay is small, you know—not more than twenty-five or thirty pounds a year, and she would be expected to use her needle. Can you use your needle?" she broke off suddenly to address Rosie.

"A little," faltered the girl, with downcast eyes.

"But I shouldn't like Rosie to go out as a nursery governess," interposed Jane eagerly. "It is only a grade higher than being a nursery-maid. It is not a fit position for her. I will not let her take it."

"She hasn't had the offer yet," replied Miss Prosser drily, "and I'm not sure she could fulfil it if she did. A hospital nurse is a fairly paid service, and many ladies undertake it. I know a hospital for women in the west of London, where

the nurses get thirty pounds a year with their board, lodging, and uniform. That means thirty pounds to put in the bank, you know, and is pure gain. But I'm afraid you're rather young for the work as yet."

"And you wouldn't have her go to a hospital, would you, and catch all sorts of fevers and bring them home to us?" demanded Jane.

"There would be no fear of that, my dear. She would probably have no time to come home."

"Oh! you must not separate us, except in the day. We have set our hearts on passing our evenings together, haven't we, Rosie?" said Jane Warner, as she wound her arm about the girl's waist.

"Yes, Jane. But the first thing I must think of is helping you."

"That's a brave speech," cried Miss Prosser, "and I like you for it, Miss Fraser. Always think of Jane, for she is a woman who never thinks of herself. How would you like to go into the telegraph, or the post-office?"

"Will it be pleasant?" inquired Rosie.

"Very few tasks done for money are pleasant. But I don't think the duties of the telegraph and post-office are worse than others," replied Miss Prosser. "There is a great deal of standing about, and the hours are long, and the pay small at first; and you must pass a simple examination, but I would soon coach you up in that."

"It is of no use in the world, Miss Prosser!" exclaimed Jane excitedly; "I will *never* allow her to go either into the telegraph or post office. Fancy Rosie standing all day in a public place, liable to be looked at or spoken to by any stranger who enters, and associating with all sorts of girls and young men. It is impossible! You might just as well propose her serving in Whiteley's, or becoming a flower-girl. Any one of her friends might see her at any moment, and blame me very justly for placing her in such a position. You must not *think* of it, Rosie. It is not to be thought of. I should never forgive myself if anything happened to you in consequence."

"I do not quite see myself what *could* happen to Miss Fraser in consequence," replied Miss Prosser, a little contemptuously; "and I did not understand, when you asked for my advice, that she was so much more fragile than the

generality of young women who have to earn their own living. As a nursery governess, or a hospital nurse, she will apparently be too much secluded, and as a telegraph or postal clerk she will not be secluded enough. I don't know what it is you *do* want for her, Jane. Money is not to be picked up for the asking, remember; and if the young lady has no especial talent for music, or painting, I am afraid she will find it difficult to support herself, except by such means as you seem to despise."

"Never mind, dear Miss Prosser," said Jane, struggling to prevent her feelings of distaste from being apparent on her countenance. "We must not talk of Rosie's prospects any more at present, for I have Caroline's cooking to superintend and direct. Rosie dear, will you fill those bowls with fresh flowers for me? You will find a basket and a pair of scissors in the lobby. And when the important dinners are cooked and served, we will take baby for a walk in the fields, and have a long discussion over this weighty matter."

When her promise was fulfilled, and the two girls—Jane bearing the sleeping infant—wandered forth together in the green lanes surrounding Chelsea, Rosie asked her new friend why she had made such strenuous objections to the plans suggested by Miss Prosser.

"For, do you know," she said, "*I* should not mind being a clerk in a public office at all, Jane. In fact, I think it would be rather fun. I knew a girl at Surbiton who was in training for it, and she liked it very much. Mamma said it was low and vulgar, of course; but then mamma thinks all work vulgar. And you are above that, Jane, I am sure."

"Yes, Rosie, I cannot call any honest work vulgar. And yet I could not let you become a Government clerk, save as a last resource. Your birth sets you above it."

"Would you have said that of a sister of your own, Jane?"

"No, dear."

"And yet we are equal. You are a lady, and no one can be more."

"My own sister would have been brought up differently from you, Rosie. She would have had no one but me and mother to think of."

"And who have I to think of?—I, whose mother has turned me out of doors!"

"There is—there is," said Jane slowly, "*your brother*. What would Sir Wilfrid think of me, Rosie, if he were to see you working in such a place, exposed to familiarity, and perhaps rudeness? He and I may never meet again—I do not think we ever shall—but I should not like him to *hear* even that I had been so careless of his little sister."

"Jane," asked Rosie presently, "would you *like* to see Wilfrid again?"

"No, no!" cried her companion, in a voice of sudden pain, as she quickened her footsteps.

"Will you be angry if I say something to you, Jane?"

"I think it would take a great deal from you to make me angry, dear."

"Yes! only this may seem rude or impertinent to you. But I don't mean it to be either. Do you know what I said to Wilfrid the morning after he brought me here—the first time I saw you?"

"How can I guess? Was it what you thought of me?"

"Of you and him. I told him—don't be angry, Jane—that I fancied you were fond of him. Now, is it true?"

Jane Warner swallowed something that had risen in her throat before she could find a voice in which to answer, and the tears swam in her eyes, and made the pleasant landscape before her dull and dim. And yet she gave a slight laugh as she replied:

"You silly girl! Why should I be?"

"Because you lived with him, and knew him so well. And Wilfrid is such a dear fellow, no one could help loving him, except that horrid Lena. And then you look so sad, Jane, when I speak of him, and you are so kind and good to me, that I thought, perhaps——"

"Go on, dear; I am listening."

"I thought it might be not for my own sake only, but for *his*. Else, why are you so careful of me, Jane, and so particular as to what I am to do?"

"Would it make you like me better, and look up to me with more confidence, Rosie, if I told you your surmise is true, and your brother and I were *once* the dearest friends?"

"I could not like you better than I do, dear Jane; but I should be glad to know that Wilfrid loved you, too."

"Not lovers, dear—not lovers!" cried the other hysteri-

cally, "only friends. But some friends, you know, are better to us than all the lovers in the world."

"And will you never be friends with him again?"

"Not in this life, Rosie."

"And all because of that horrid Lena, I suppose, who is tired of him already. Oh! how I wish he had married you instead!"

But Jane did not answer her again. She was putting all the restraint upon herself she could, to prevent her tears falling upon the sleeping child.

A few days after, when Rosie's boxes had arrived, she brought a little coloured photograph to Jane, and asked her to accept it for a bedroom ornament. It was a picture of the Blessed Virgin and Child.

"I fancy the baby is like little Nellie," she said, in explanation, "and perhaps you will like to keep it, Jane, for that reason."

"Thank you, dear. I think it *does* resemble her. How prettily it is coloured!"

"Do you think so?" exclaimed Rosie, with a blush. "Why, *I* painted it, Jane! I have painted lots of photographs. It's very amusing work."

"*You* coloured this!" repeated Jane incredulously. "My dear Rosie, why didn't you tell me you could paint like this before?"

"Why, what good is it?" cried Rosie, laughing.

"All the good in the world for you, my dear. My friend, Mr. Denham, was speaking to me about it only the other day. Put on your hat at once, Rosie, and we will go and see him this very minute."

She dragged the girl away with her as she spoke, and the upshot of the conference was that Miss Fraser was engaged forthwith to colour photographs in Mr. Denham's studio; and displayed so much talent and adaptability for the work that she was very soon able to relieve the Warners entirely of any expense on her account.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WILFRID.

MEANWHILE Sir Wilfrid was very unhappy. The mere fact of his favourite sister being driven from his home by the unkindness of his wife would have been sufficient to poison his existence; but when Rosie's departure from Lambscote was followed by her actual flight and disappearance from them all, he became miserably anxious and self-reproachful. Even the letter he received from Wales, and which she sent him through the agency of Mrs. Patty Penryn, was no more than a passing drop of comfort. It told him she was alive, and he had never doubted that fact; but it left him completely in the dark concerning her address or her surroundings, and held out no hope of their ever meeting again. When the first feelings of relief experienced from its reception had evaporated, Sir Wilfrid became more morose and dissatisfied than before. It seemed as if he had never known till then how much he loved his sister. He could not bear to keep the things which she had used in his sight. He directed the coachman to sell her pony, and to lock up the boat she had learned to row in in the boat-house. He flew in a rage one day with the housekeeper because he overheard her call the chintz chamber "Miss Rosie's room," and smashed a valuable old china bowl, which she had been accustomed to fill with fresh flowers each morning and set upon his writing-table. In fact, all the household observed how altered the young Baronet became when his sister left the Hall. As for Mrs. Ewell, she soon found that she had worked irrevocable evil for herself and her daughters by the harshness she had displayed towards her youngest child.

There was no hope whatever that Sir Wilfrid would choose Edith, or Fanny, or Laura, or Mary, to fill the place left vacant by little Rosie. He would listen to none of his mother's explanations. He would accept none of her excuses. He openly accused her and his wife and Lady Otto of having been in league to separate him from his sister, and declared that no one should benefit by the good things which she was

no longer able to accept. But he did not relinquish his admiration of nor passion for his wife in consequence.

The feelings of a man for a woman are the very strongest feelings in his nature, and though he may know her to be unworthy, and unreciprocative, and untrue, it is difficult for him all at once to separate *what is* from *what should be*, or to stamp out the lust of the eye which first attracted him towards her. He continued, therefore, in common parlance, to *make love* to Lena. He had his moments of fierce passion, and vehement longing, and pride of possession. But they grew to pass more rapidly, and to occur less frequently, and to leave a more unsatisfied feeling behind them.

Lady Ewell, in fact, was a woman that the more a man saw of the less he liked. Her selfishness became painfully apparent upon a closer view, and, cunning as she was, she found it difficult never to be found out in lying. It was the first lie in which her husband detected her that shook the edifice that afterwards came tumbling down about his ears. He had believed in her so fully. He had thought—as men will be foolish enough to think—that because the outside of the sepulchre was fair, the inside must be all sweetness, and the shock of discovery was one from which he never quite recovered.

He had several quarrels with her, naturally, on the subject of Rosie's departure. Lena was at first so positive that her own behaviour had had nothing whatever to do with the resolution of her sister-in-law, and afterwards, when the news of Rosie's flight from Surbiton had reached them, and became an assured fact, she launched out into such cruel invectives against the absent girl—in such cruel insinuations and doubts of the purity of her conduct and motives—that Sir Wilfrid would not listen to her, and ordered her sternly to hold her tongue.

"I have made you mistress of this place," he exclaimed in his anger, "and I cannot prevent your behaving in so discourteous a manner as to make even my own relations avoid it as a pest-house. But I am not compelled to sit down and listen to all the vile slander you may see fit to circulate of them. You know how I love Rosie. Had you any consideration, you would feel too much sympathy in my present uncertainty and distress regarding her to mention her name at all, far less to try and make me think worse of her than I

ever shall. Once for all, Lena, I do not believe any of your stories against my sister. She is too much a child to have misconducted herself except through ignorance, and you ought to have been the one to prevent that."

Lady Ewell shrugged her shoulders.

"A nice *child*!" she echoed, with a sneer. "You men are really too silly for anything. If Rose is a child, pray never call me a woman again. She goes on in the most open manner whilst here, and as soon as her conduct is remarked upon, she elopes—nobody knows *where*, or with *whom*—and yet you want me to go on swearing to her innocence and perfect purity. It is too utterly absurd."

"There you commence again, Lena, with your vague accusations. Now, will you be good enough to tell me exactly what you mean? I want chapter and verse for all you say. *What* did my sister do to shock you whilst at Lambcote, and with *whom* did she misconduct herself? There were only Grahame, and Dorsay, and the two St. Blases here. It must have been one of the four. Give me the man's name outright, and I will settle the matter with him."

But *this* was what Lady Ewell neither wished nor intended to do. To give up Captain Dorsay's name would have been to turn him into a reference on the subject, and she knew him too well to believe that he would uphold her statements. She had already had a violent quarrel with him about her sister-in-law, and he had left the Hall, fearing the trouble her anger might lead to for himself, and vowing vengeance against her for her jealousy and interference.

Lena knew she was in his black books at the present moment, and was trusting to time and his own expediency to bring them together again. For, strange to say, the one soft spot in the heart of this cold woman, was reserved for the man who had despised her from the commencement of their acquaintance, and sickened of her long ago. Had Lena not married, and had Captain Dorsay not foreseen some temporal advantages to be gained from an assumed friendship for her husband, he would probably have long ere this period been off to "fresh fields and pastures new." And yet, after her worldly, selfish fashion, she loved him. She would have sacrificed everything—even her rank and riches—for him, had he so willed it.

But Jack Dorsay was far too selfish himself to encourage

her folly. He would not have encumbered himself with such a burthen. But he had no objection to bask in her smiles at Lambcote Hall whilst she behaved properly. And to have made a quarrel between him and Sir Wilfrid Ewell would have been to deprive herself of his society for ever.

Lena was cunning enough to know all this, and to remember it, and the remembrance held her dumb. When her husband dared her to tell him *which* of their guests had trifled with his sister, she cast down her eyes and was silent. It was as much as to say she knew, but would not reveal the secret ; but Sir Wilfrid interpreted the action otherwise. He chose to believe that she did not speak because she *could* not.

"It is just as I thought," he said. "You can be unwomanly enough to rouse my suspicions respecting a poor girl who is not here to defend herself, but directly I bring you to book, and desire you to prove your words, you are unable to do so. But mind you, Lena ! Rosie will not be lost to us for ever. I shall not cease to search for her until she is found. It is my duty. And when we meet again, I will have the whole story from her own lips, that I may judge how far you have deceived me."

"And you will believe *her* in preference to *me* ?" cried Lady Ewell angrily. "You will take the word of a child, whose aim it will be to make you think the best of her behaviour, before that of your own wife !"

"Oh, Lena, my dearest, it is the last thing in the world I wish to do ! But the side you have taken in this sad affair has made me miserable—perhaps unjust. Since you *are* my own wife, why cannot you believe as I do, instead of being a mere echo of Lady Otto's sentiments ?"

"It is not Lady Otto alone who thinks as I do. Your mother holds exactly the same opinion. She says that Rosie is a disgrace to the family, and she has forbidden her sisters to mention her name before her."

"Yes, she is very harsh, and very unlike a mother," replied Sir Wilfrid. "And just now she is worse than usual, because I refuse to entertain her ideas respecting Rosie. But that is no reason why you should imitate her. I want my wife to be a perfect woman, softhearted and charitable, as a woman should be."

"Then you should not have married *me*," Lena said, with a laugh and a sneer, "for I never was these things."

"Don't say that, dearest, for you belie yourself. Could anything have looked softer or more delicately fragile than you did when I first met you? How well I remember the time and the occasion! It was just before dinner, and I entered this very room, not knowing you were here. And there you stood, draped in pure white, with lilies in your breast and hair, and——"

"Oh, for goodness sake, Wilfrid, stop these absurd rhapsodies!" cried Lady Ewell fretfully. "It makes me sick to hear a grown-up man mooning over such things, as if he were a calf or a baby."

He stopped at that suddenly and completely, whilst a look of the deepest pain passed over his countenance.

"Lena, do not be so unkind! You cannot mean what you say. It is too cruel of you."

"I *do* mean it! I have told you thousands of times that I hate 'spooning.' What sense is there in these memories? We are married and done for, and there's an end of it."

"Sometimes you make me fear there is an end of it—an end of everything—love, hope, and happiness. But it is a sorry end for such a bright beginning, Lena."

"I did not know it *was* a bright beginning. We married, I suppose, as other folks do, for our mutual convenience—at least *I* did."

"And I married you for something much higher and better, for your love and sympathy, Lena, and you know it,"

"Indeed, I know no such thing, neither do I believe it. You married me for—well, I suppose, for my beauty; and I married you for—for——"

"For *what*—in Heaven's name?"

"For what all women marry—a settlement. If there were no settlements in marriage, you may be quite sure there would be no wives. We might just as well be free—in fact, far better. There is no particular fun that I can see in being chained all your life to one man."

Sir Wilfrid, listening to her, turned very pale.

"You did not marry me for my *money*, Lena?" he said hoarsely. "Don't tell me that!"

"Could I have married you without it?" she answered. "Now, don't pretend to be so innocent, Wilfrid. You knew as well as anybody, when you came into your fortune, that you were a *bon parti*. Would you have had the

courage to propose to me else, knowing I had refused you before ? ”

“ But that was your mother’s fault. You acted under her influence—you told me so.”

“ As if one did not say anything when one is being courted. Really, Wilfrid, I credited you with more sense. You have got me now, beyond all dispute. Cannot you be satisfied with that ? ”

“ No ; I *cannot* be satisfied with that ! he exclaimed loudly. “ I cannot be satisfied with knowing merely that you are Lady Ewell. I want *my wife*, Lena, the woman I fell in love with under my cousin Robert’s roof, whom I dreamed of and longed after for years, whom I asked in the gloaming on the river if she loved me well enough to give her life to me, and who answered ‘ Yes.’ I want *that woman*, and her whole heart. Oh, Lena ! tell me that it is mine.”

“ My dear Wilfrid,” said Lady Ewell, “ if you know any thing about me you must know how I detest such raving. It is exceedingly silly, and the very worst form. If you wish to command my interest, for Heaven’s sake be reasonable.”

Her cold eye turned on him with more than indifference—with distaste, and Sir Wilfrid’s doom was fixed from that hour. He knew the worst now. There was no teaching this wife to love him.

“ I did not think,” he muttered, as he wiped his brow, “ that any woman could be so heartless. But I can believe anything now. Even that you married me—as you so plainly have said—for my money.”

“ You can believe what you choose,” she answered indifferently, “ It cannot make any difference in our lives. Indeed, I think it much better for married people to be candid with each other ; it saves such a heap of trouble.”

“ You are right. Only, if the candour came before marriage, instead of after, it would save such a heap of misery into the bargain.”

Lady Ewell laughed carelessly.

“ I don’t see the necessity of extremes, either one way or the other. People who are sensible enough not to expect happiness beforehand escape the misery afterwards. But you were always a mystery to me, Wilfrid. It’s no wonder you keep so thin, fretting and fussing over trifles as you do.”

"And you call my love for you and my bitter disappointment *trifles*?" he answered sadly.

"You ought to think them so, and they would cease to bother you, my dear. But don't let us waste any more time over the irremediable. You should remember the good old proverb, 'No use crying over spilt milk.' And I particularly want to go to the Taunton flower-show this afternoon. Will you come? I had a box from Madame Claire last night, and intend to make myself look extra fascinating."

"No, thank you," said her husband, turning on his heel. "You have told me *that* to-day, Lena, that makes me disinclined for anything—unless it be to cut my throat," he added in a lower voice.

"Oh, you baby!" she called after him as he left the room.

But he did not turn back, nor answer her. His heart was too sore for badinage, too wounded to resent an insult.

She did not love him, and she never had done so. Perhaps the intelligence was not quite new to him; but he had not realized it so fully before. To hear it from her own lips, accompanied with sneers at his folly, was very hard to bear. And as Sir Wilfrid wandered about his grounds, downcast and alone, brooding over his disappointment and the misery of an unrequited love, there came into his mind for the first time, a doubt whether it might not be a judgment sent by Heaven upon him for his perfidy to Jane Warner.



CHAPTER XXV.

DIVISION.

THE unpleasant understanding arrived at between Sir Wilfrid and Lady Ewell proved to be the commencement of a complete division in their interests. It was—

“The little rift within the lute,
Which, widening slowly, made the music mute.”

Not that there had ever been much music in their domestic intercourse. Had the man's eyes been but open, he must have seen from the beginning what a cold, heartless, and unprincipled woman he had made his wife.

But men when in love are blind. Their passion glorifies everything that concerns the object of it in their eyes, and they are ready to strike the friend who would perform the unpleasant operation of restoring their sight.

It is extraordinary how the master passion transforms the feelings, the tastes, and even the character of an individual. What he has raved against as hideous yesterday, he declares to be beautiful to-day. What he was indifferent to last month, he is now ready to worship. And this infatuation, which is truly for the time being insanity, does not need to be excited by the handsome, the witty, or the virtuous. The ugliest and commonest of females have been found capable of driving their followers to distraction.

It can only be accounted for on the supposition that the Creator designed it as a means of bringing the sexes to a mutual understanding, and preventing the world running after one woman or one man. And so each creature imagines he has secured the solitary jewel from amidst a heap of glass. Beautiful and inimitable dispensation! Could any but a Divine mind have ordered it? But all loves are not made of such base metal, nor conceived whilst labouring under temporary insanity.

There are affections between the sexes that last a lifetime, and live after death—affections which breed passion as warm

and overwhelming as any of these shortlived madnesses, but which survive when passion has passed away. Such friends—for they are more than lovers—can see each other's faults, and yet be constant. They do not expect perfection. They know their own infirmities, short-comings, and human frailties. Why should they believe a fellow creature to be above them?

These are the men and women of sense in this world, the little leaven that tries, but without much success, to leaven the whole lump. For some people will affirm that common-sense cannot be co-existent with love—that if it manifests itself, you must call the feeling by some other name. But these casuists have yet to learn what love is. When will the herd distinguish it from passion, its glory and its crown? Love should be perfected in the heart, as a sculptor moulds the creation of his brain. First, the solid basis. The plinths rising one above the other, each firmer than the last, because with a broader ground to rest upon. That is friendship. The feeling which does not *spring*, but *grows* from knowledge of the other's worth, which cannot be kicked over nor knocked aside at a moment's notice, but, once planted, remains a monument of stability. What rises on those plinths? The statue! *Love!*

The child of the brain and the heart, beautiful, imperishable, pure. Not perfect without friendship, because it must have a basis upon which to rest; but so lovely that, once perfected, we never look below it. All our actions, our admiration, our sympathy, our forbearance—three most necessary ingredients in domestic happiness—spring from its source, and make us feel that we no longer are *alone*.

Another heart beats in unison with ours, another head thinks with our own, another hand is stretched forth to help us. Then, fellow mortals, when on such a basis you have reared such a statue, crown it with what flowers you will, and call *them* passion. Your wreath cannot be too large nor too full to do honour to the choice of your understanding.

Mix blood-red poppies with the golden corn; the roses of rapture with the lilies of languor; the heavy scented narcissi, the perfumed violet, the fair forget-me-not. Bring every flower from the garden and the field to crown your love. But do not forget that they will fade—that in the course of nature they *must* fade. It is no fault of theirs, nor

yours. It is the ordinance of heaven. But when they wither, your statue will still be yours. Love will rear its beautiful head towards heaven as pure and imperishable as before. But woe betide the man who grasps a wreath of flowers and calls it love, and expects that it will last for ever.

When the scarlet poppies have turned black, the roses droop, and the violets decay, he will curse love by his gods, and declare that all women are false, and there is no truth nor constancy in human nature. But he alone is the deceiver. He has deceived *himself*, and been untrue to his better judgment and his common-sense. And yet how many there are in the world who argue in like manner!

Sir Wilfrid Ewell was one of them. He had erred in ignorance, but the awakening to knowledge was none the less bitter. Some men can make themselves contented with the wreath of flowers only. They want nothing better. When one wreath has withered, they twine another, and their base nature is satisfied.

But Wilfrid was not one of these. He had a heart and a soul, although he had never taken the trouble to analyze their requirements. And it was a great shock to him to find that they were still hungering after something which they had never received, and were never likely to receive, at the hands of Lady Ewell.

The knowledge did not come to him all at once. Such knowledge seldom does. The first quarrel between a husband and wife is seldom the last, and though Sir Wilfrid tried hard to prevent anything like unseemly bickering in his household, he found it very difficult sometimes to keep his temper. Lena became so trying, not from what she did, so much as from what she did *not* do. She never contradicted the statement she made to him on the occasion recorded in the last chapter—that she had married him for his money.

At first Sir Wilfrid tried to coax her to do so. He would take advantage of her softer moments to ask her to unsay those words, and tell him that she *did* love him, if ever so little, when she consented to become his wife. But Lena refused to gratify him. Not that she held any absurd scruples about deceiving her husband, or would have hesitated to tell a falsehood to serve her own purpose. But it was not worth her while to deceive him. On the contrary, she foresaw that the truth might save her trouble in the future. Wilfrid

stayed so pertinaciously at home. He would not even let her visit her friends alone. It was really too absurd, and people were beginning to talk about it, and hint that he must be jealous of her. If the whole of her life was to be passed in this manner, the sooner it was over the better. So she continued to treat her husband's sentiment with a moral cold douche, until he dropped the subject altogether.

Men cannot go on making love to marble for ever. They want something a little more responsive, *even* in their wives. So poor Sir Wilfrid—young, impressionable, and still ardent—came to the conclusion that the less he spoke of love to Lena the more amiable she would be to him, and very soon it had sunk to a forbidden topic. How different it had been with Jane Warner! Sometimes, as the young man rode or walked about the country, he let his thoughts wander back into the past, and compared the feelings of these two women for himself. How poor Jane's eyes used to glow with pleasure as she welcomed him to Chelsea! They were not glowing eyes as a rule. They were very quiet and serious in their usual aspect; but he had seen them under divers circumstances. He knew how they could beam with love beneath his kisses, fill with tears at his reproof, and flash with anger—as he had seen them last—at the thought of any cruelty, injustice, or crime. He could not help wondering sometimes whether Jane would have changed to him as Lena had done if he had set her on a pinnacle as Lady Ewell, and his heart said "No."

There was no infidelity towards his wife in this decision. He still worshipped the beautiful, worthless creature, and would not have displaced her if he could. Only—he would have given his life almost for one look of love from her eyes, such as had been so common during his first marriage. What was Jane doing now? How did she feel with regard to him? Was the wound healed, and had she already turned her thoughts towards a happier and more suitable life than he could have offered her? Sir Wilfrid would have liked to know. He had now been married two years, and the autumn leaves were falling for the second time since he had parted with her. But during all that period he had not dared to go near Chelsea. He had not written to her, nor inquired after her. He had even checked his thoughts when they had turned in her direction, until Lena's

coldness and unkindness had forced them back to the girl he had once fancied that he loved.

Once fancied! As these words passed through Sir Wilfrid's mind, he stopped short in his ramble, and asked himself the straightforward question, "Was it *once*, or did he love her still? Was it possible that he could love Lena and Jane Warner at the same time? And his doubt opens up one of wider interest to the world. Is it possible that a man should love two or more women at once, not in the same degree, perhaps, but at the same time? If it is possible, it must be natural. And I believe the experience of the world proves that it is not only possible but an everyday occurrence. The law of the country forbids a man to keep more than one wife, therefore his eyes are held in control, and his inclinations under curb, as much for his own sake as for that of the woman or women he may illegally admire. Whether the law is a wise one is altogether another question. So many laws are very unwise that it admits at least of argument. But that it ever prevented a husband from being faithless to his wife is a very dubious matter. Many men are so almost against their own will, if not their inclination. They have no wish to desert their wives, or make them unhappy, but their fancy is irresistibly drawn in another direction—sometimes permanently so—and the usual consequences ensue.

If men had the option of marrying more than one wife, they would probably not be faithless half so often, and women would not fall victims to their seductions. It is the fruit that hangs beyond its reach that human nature craves for. Place it on the sideboard, and as often as not it is never touched at all.

Sir Wilfrid had by his own act placed Jane Warner beyond his reach, and now he could not help his wishes roving in her direction. He told himself that were the time to come over again he should act exactly in the same manner. Yet he could not quite *unlove* her. He thought of all her quiet, unobtrusive love for him, which made itself felt every hour; and though he would not have given up his beautiful Lena for the world, he knew that he had a very warm corner in his heart left for his poor deserted Jane. And, had the law of the land permitted it, Sir Wilfrid would undoubtedly have claimed a second wife, and perhaps—who knows until the

experiment be tried?—been quite as good a husband to one as to the other. As it was, however, he could only think and sigh. Meanwhile, Lena made him sigh the most of the two. When a young married man, with liberal means at his disposal, is being constantly reminded that his wife sees a great deal too much of him, and that his room would be preferable to his company, he is not slow, as a rule, to avail himself of the golden opportunity afforded him.

Lambscote Hall was certainly a beautiful home to live in, and had he been happy there, the young Baronet—who had very domestic tastes—would probably have been transformed into a regular country gentleman, whose best amusements lay in shooting and fishing and hunting, and never cared to visit London at all. But the country, shared by uncongenial companionship, becomes the reverse of Paradise. It requires a conscience at ease, and a heart free from care, to make friends with monotony. And poor Wilfrid Ewell had neither. If he remained indoors, Lena's cold indifference, or her entreaties to be left alone, drove him out. And when he wandered abroad, Jane's image seemed to be ever present, filling him with self-reproach, and making him wonder if he had any duty left concerning her, and if so, what that duty was.

At last Lena announced to him her intention of going to Paris for a few months, in company with Lady Otto. It was altogether too miserable at Lambscote in autumn, she averred, and her mother thought she was looking wretchedly thin and ill. Her husband had taken her to Spain, to Italy, and to France, already in their brief married life, besides to various watering-places at the fashionable season of the year. But she insisted that she had not sufficient change, and that the air of Somerset was simply killing her. And, indeed, it was true that Lady Ewell's health had not improved since her marriage. She had never shown any signs of bringing him a family, which was already a source of anxiety to him, and she had had more than one alarming attack of palpitation, which the doctors ascribed entirely to weakness.

But Lady Ewell refused to give up any of her fashionable dissipations in consequence. She would dance, and go to theatres, and keep late hours whenever she had the opportunity, and her husband did not know that all this rushing

about was kept up in order that she might enjoy the company of Captain Dorsay. When he heard her say that she had made arrangements to go to Paris with her mother, he naturally thought that he was included in them.

"It is a very inconvenient time to choose, Lena," he said with a frown. "You've been to Paris already this year, and to Scarborough. What on earth do you want more? It is most inconsiderate of you to take me away from Lambscote in the middle of the shooting. Besides, I have half-a-dozen men coming down next week. I really don't see how I *can* go."

"Who *asked* you to go?" replied Lady Ewell. "I am sure *I* didn't, and mamma has not said a word on the subject—in fact, I know she doesn't expect you. She has only secured rooms for herself and me. She wants me to have a little change, and it's no change if you take all your domestic belongings about with you."

Sir Wilfred looked pained.

"*Going without me, Lena?* Why, how long will you be away?"

"I don't know. It depends entirely on mamma. A few weeks, perhaps, or a few months. But what does it signify? I suppose you have no wish to keep me a prisoner in this dreary place?"

"My dearest! *No!* Only—what shall I do without you? We have not been married two years yet. It seems so soon to part."

"Oh, Wilfrid, don't be so ridiculous. If you wanted a wife to stick always at home, why didn't you marry your housekeeper? You really must break yourself of this absurd calf-love for me. Mamma says I shall be the laughing-stock of Society if you go on in this way. That is one reason why I am determined to leave you. I am really quite sick of it all."

Men cannot stand being ridiculed, especially when their affections are concerned. As Sir Wilfrid heard that his passion for Lena had been discussed by his mother-in-law, he grew red with shame and anger.

"Very well," he answered brusquely, "I shall not trouble you with it any more. I cannot leave off loving you, Lena, worse luck, but I will leave off showing my love for you from this day. Lady Otto shall have no further cause for

anxiety. Only, don't blame me if I should take to making love in some other direction."

"You are quite welcome, my dear boy," she called after him, laughing; "in fact, I should be rather pleased than otherwise, for it would save me an infinity of trouble. Besides, it's all the fashion nowadays. It's the most *rococo* thing possible for a husband and wife to care for each other. Most monotonous for Society, which has to look on, and rather worse than monotonous for themselves."

He was leaving the room, but at these words he strode back to her sofa, with a face dark with passion.

"Take care how far you become *fashionable* in that particular, Lena!" he exclaimed angrily; "for, by George! I am not the man to stand any trifling with my honour! I dare say you think because I am such a fool I can't help showing my love for you, that I would let you do anything you choose?—but you are mistaken. You are free as the air to go anywhere you like with your mother or myself. You may spend my money like water—commit any extravagance or any folly—and I will consent to it without even the reward of a smile. But *there* my indulgence ceases. If ever I find that you have even trifled with my name, or given your fashionable acquaintances a handle to sneer at my blind folly, from that day you remain at Lambscote! Do you understand me? I gave you my name untarnished, and, by Heaven, you shall keep it so!"

Lady Ewell lay on her sofa, with closed eyes, and sniffed at her scent-bottle in silence.

"Have you quite done?" she asked, when her husband ceased speaking.

"I *have*—quite done."

"Then perhaps you will ask my pardon for the insults you have heaped upon me?"

"*Insults!* What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. You threaten me first with making love to some other woman, and when I bandy a light jest with you in return, you throw the grossest insult at my head that a man can offer his wife. I demand an apology from you, and if you refuse it, I will go at once to the protection of my mother."

Sir Wilfrid was completely dumfounded by this attack. His burst of anger had confused his brain, and though he

knew that he had had cause for it, he had already forgotten how it had arisen, and was shocked at the effect it had produced.

"Oh, Lena!" he exclaimed, falling on his knees beside her couch, "what *have* I said to you? Forgive me, darling—you know I did not mean it. I have the utmost faith and trust in you. If I had not, do you think that I could live another moment? But the mere thought that you could ever flirt with another man—that you even think lightly of flirting—fills me with dismay. Don't mind what your friends say is *fashionable*, dearest. Obey the dictates of your own heart, and I am sure they will never lead you wrong. Say you forgive me, Lena, and I will promise never to hint at such horrors in your hearing again."

Lady Ewell was very anxious to get this domestic scene over. She had all the dislike to legitimate love-making that she credited herself with, and regarded a husband's kisses as necessary evils, to be taken like a dose of medicine, as quickly as possible, and without too much thinking over. So she permitted the poor boy (he was not yet four-and-twenty) to make the *amende honorable* as he chose; and, having murmured a few indistinct words of forgiveness, rose from the sofa, shook out her skirts, and retreated to her own room. But the upshot of Sir Wilfrid's false move was, that Lady Ewell was permitted to join Lady Otto St. Blase in her trip to Paris without receiving any more remonstrances upon the subject.



CHAPTER XXVI.

DORSAY.

BUT the young husband she left behind her was anything but happy. In the first place, he felt her leaving Lambscote at that season of the year. He had invited several men for the pheasant shooting, and naturally he wanted his wife to do the honours of the Hall. And her desertion was a double injury, for the lady guests had to be put off from coming, so that the sportsmen had to amuse themselves.

It was but poor satisfaction to give the cook and house-keeper *carte blanche* for the entertainment of his visitors. Dinners and luncheons are all very well in their way; but we may credit the majority of men with requiring a little more amusement than what is derived from gratifying their appetites. So that, although the young host did all he could to make his guests happy and comfortable—and though as a rule those of a sex got on very well together, and more peaceably, without an admixture of the disturbing element—time was apt to hang heavy in the evenings without the ladies, and they generally retired to rest early.

When Lena and her mother had been settled in Paris nearly a month, Captain Dorsay turned up, rather unexpectedly, at Lambscote Hall. Sir Wilfrid had not invited him, although he knew no reason why he should have a grudge against the man. But he had always considered Jack Dorsay as a friend of Lady Otto St. Blase and her family, and had left it to his wife to invite him as she thought fit.

But he had not been seen at Lambscote since Rosie's departure from it, a year before, and, to tell truth, the reason of Lady Ewell's restlessness was because she was afraid she had offended him on that occasion beyond forgiveness. She could not tear her thoughts from this unworthy man, do what she would, and though she had seen how little he cared for her, she still hoped on that some day his truant heart would come back pleading for re-acceptance at her hands.

But that just happened to be the last idea in Jack Dorsay's

head. He saw through her worldly and selfish character thoroughly—much better than her husband did—and would not have taken her as a gift from his hands. In fact, Sir Wilfrid had less to fear from Captain Dorsay than from any other man—had he only known it—or, rather, had Lena only known it. But she shut her eyes (as children shut theirs at a fancied ghost) and refused to believe the truth.

To analyze Jack Dorsay's feelings and intentions at this moment, so as to make them intelligible to the reader, would be a difficult task. At all events, they had nothing to do with Lena—indeed, had she been at Lambcote, the Hall would probably not have known the honour of his company.

It has been said that Sir Wilfrid was surprised to see him; but at the same time he was not sorry. He knew nothing of the part he had played when his little sister left the Hall—nothing of the influence he had gained over his wife; and Captain Dorsay was an agreeable companion and a good fellow amongst men.

Perhaps it would not be out of place here to probe his feelings regarding Rosie Ewell and her mysterious disappearance from Society, the whole account of which he had received in Lady Ewell's letters. To commence, then, he was sorry—at first, very sorry indeed. He had taken an unusual interest in the innocent, childish nature enfolded to him. Perhaps if all things had gone smoothly, and Lena had not interfered between them, Lady Otto's prediction might have come true, and he might have succumbed to Rosie's influence, and his hard nature been purified through her love for him. But it was fortunate for the girl that it was not so. He might have secured his own salvation, but he would have broken her heart in doing it. The love of such a man is not worth having—his scruples vanish into thin air; his repentance is seldom lasting, and his regret is as evanescent as his affection.

Rosie Ewell had had a fortunate escape, although Captain Dorsay still considered himself an ill-used man, and believed that the best love of his life had been torn from him.

And in this belief he owed a heavy debt of revenge to Lena Ewell. He had not forgotten what she had said on that occasion, nor that he held her in his power for saying it. He did not wish to have his payment out of her. He cared too little for her to attempt it, for he knew that at any

moment he could make her his—and no sportsman cares for the bird that walks up to the gun.

But he thought he knew of a better method by which to gratify his thirst for revenge. She had a rich husband. She had married him for his money alone, and all she valued was his wealth and his position.

If Captain Dorsay could deprive her of both, he would. He was poor—too little of a gentleman to work, and too much of a gentleman to beg. He was fond, when referring to his poverty, of quoting the text of Scripture apposite to his circumstances. Yet he did not consider it discreditable to make the larger part of his income by the illicit means of play. Jack Dorsay was a confirmed gambler, whose face was as familiar on every race-course as in the London saloons. He played professionally, and he invariably played to win. Dark stories had been circulated about town concerning his good luck—stories which had made Lady Otto St. Blase so determinately his enemy. But they had been circulated chiefly by the men who had lost their money to him, and had never gained more than a partial credence. And without doubt Captain Dorsay was a general favourite with both sexes.

Sir Wilfrid's jealousy of him had by this time completely evaporated. In the first place, he believed too much in the faith of the false creature he called his wife to permit such a feeling to gain any real ground with him. In the second, he had never seen any looks nor heard any words pass between them that could provoke its resurrection. Lena was too clever to play her cards awkwardly, and Captain Dorsay had drilled her into maintaining an attitude of indifference towards him in the presence of her family on penalty of his leaving Lambcote Hall for ever. He had not been in the society of Sir Wilfrid Ewell very long before he had made up his mind concerning him. Here was a fat pigeon ready to be plucked. A green young fellow, with little or no experience, and just come into plenty of money, the source of which he doubtless believed to be simply inexhaustible.

Captain Dorsay had no notion of missing the glorious chance which loomed in the future for the sake of a woman for whom he had lost all regard. But he knew on the occasion of his first visit to the Hall that his time was not come. A man desperately and idiotically in love as Wilfrid was in

those few delirious months of passion, may play a little for pleasure, but not to drown pain. So Jack Dorsay held his hand. He knew that, sooner or later, the scales must fall from the young husband's eyes, and he would be thankful to anyone who would show him a way to kill that greatest enemy to a wounded spirit—thought.

Lady Ewell had seen her old friend on her way to Paris. She had coquetted with him for more than a week in London, and parted with him in the firm belief that he would follow her abroad. He had sworn he would do so as soon as ever he could get away from one or two pressing engagements he had on hand. Men will swear anything to get rid of a woman who wearies them. But from one or two hints let drop by the fair Lena, Captain Dorsay guessed that she and Sir Wilfrid had not parted on the best terms, and fancied it might be worth his while to run down to Lambcote and see how the land lay. The pigeon might not yet be ripe for plucking, but it would be just as well to give him a few hints in the right direction.

The Baronet received him cordially. He was dull and hipped, and his guests were not a very bright lot, and Jack Dorsay was just the man to stir them up and keep them going. And the second night he was there—after they had finished an uproarious evening of funny stories and comic songs, and the other fellows had betaken themselves to bed or fallen asleep in their chairs—Sir Wilfrid found himself pacing the moonlit terrace in company with Jack Dorsay, and confiding to him somehow his disappointment respecting his wife. Not that he blamed Lena for a moment; only he wished that Lady Otto had chosen some other time for her visit to Paris, and he said so freely. Captain Dorsay looked grave. As an old friend of the family, he might be permitted to make his remarks on the subject, and it was his present cue *not* to praise either Lady Ewell or her mother.

"Look here, old fellow," he said familiarly, as they walked side by side with their pipes in their mouths, "you won't be offended at anything I say—will you? I've known the St. Blases a long time, you know. Why my father and the Duke were chums at college, and I think I may say Lord Martyrdom looks on me almost as a son. As for Lady Ewell, I remember her in her frilled pantalettes when I was a big chap at Eton. Well, knowing them all so intimately, what I

say is this—if you'll forgive my offering you a bit of advice. Don't let Lena—you'll excuse my calling her 'Lena'—it *will* slip out sometimes—we've been almost like brother and sister together——”

“My dear Dorsay, call her anything you like,” interposed Sir Wilfrid.

“Don't let Lady Ewell be too much with her mother, that's all. Lady Otto's a very good sort of woman, but they're better apart.”

“But, my dear fellow, how *am* I to prevent it? Lena is an only child, you know, and it seems brutal to forbid her to see her mother. What excuse could I make? And my wife—she's a dear girl, and as good as gold when all goes right—but she is rather difficult to manage at times, you know, and——”

Dorsay struck his stick into Sir Wilfrid's ribs.

“Don't tell *me*,” he said, laughing; “do you suppose *I* don't know? But it's just her mother has done it. She has indulged her in everything, and let her have her own way—good, bad, or indifferent—so long as it accorded with her prospects for her. But directly it crossed *that*—whew!—there was the old gentleman to pay, and no pitch hot. It is Lady Otto that ruined Lena. You may take my oath of that.”

“But Lena seems very much attached to her mother,” sighed Sir Wilfrid.

“Because she gets her own way with her. Now that she is safely married, it is no longer Lady Otto's business to interfere. She has transferred her responsibility to you. And if you don't enforce your authority where you see it is right why, I pity you, that's all!”

“But what could I do? Lady Ewell set her heart upon going to Paris.”

“You should have made her remain at Lambscote to receive her guests.”

“But she said she felt ill, and unequal to the exertion.”

Dorsay laughed.

“All fudge! A woman's trick! Forgive me, my dear Ewell, but I am so much older than yourself, and have known her so long. Once take the curb off Lena St. Blase and she is bound to kick over the traces. Very beautiful, but very

wilful; all beautiful women are. We spoil them till they lose their heads. You are her husband, and have a right to the upper hand; but if you mean to keep it, you must go on a different tack."

"Give me your advice, Dorsay, and I will try to follow it. I know I'm a great fool about her, but I can't help being unhappy. Perhaps she has told you—as I know you are such friends—that I fell in love with her years ago, and she wouldn't have me. When she came round, it took me so much by surprise, I thought she must care for me as I cared for her. But I'm afraid I was too sanguine. We have only been married two years, and she seems tired of this place already. She wants me to leave it and live altogether in town; but I don't see my way to that. What am I to do?"

"Nothing, my dear boy, but what you think best for yourself. Just listen to me. Lena has been spoilt all her life, and you continue to spoil her, and she won't like you a bit the better for it—women never do. They're made to be ruled, and they love to feel the curb, if it's not too tight. Your best plan for the present is this: Let her remain with her mother. Pretend it makes no difference to you where she is, but don't let her imagine that you fret. Take some chambers in town, and keep them for your own convenience, and run up whenever you feel inclined. I'll introduce you to a first-rate set, and we'll put up your name at the clubs. No man can belong to the fashion who mopes in the country all the year round. You don't know how it would brighten you up to pay us an occasional visit."

"But my wife——"

"My dear fellow, it's your wife I am thinking of most. She'll treat you twice as well when she finds you have secured a refuge from her little tempers. I know her, Ewell. I know the whole blessed sex. Kneel down before them and put their feet upon your neck, and they'll trample you to death. Take their wrists and hold them firmly—show them that, unless you choose, they can neither stir nor extricate themselves—and they will cry for mercy. No woman cares for the man that cannot master her."

"I had hoped to rule my wife by love rather than by fear," said Sir Wilfrid, with a deep sigh.

"Then you shouldn't have married a woman," replied

Dorsay, "above all, such a woman as Lena St. Blase. You asked for my advice—I hope I have not offended you in giving it."

"Not at all; on the contrary, I am obliged to you, and I will take it—that is, as far as the chambers are concerned. I could live my whole life here *with* Lena, but without her it is awfully dull, and in her last letter she says she wants to stay over the new year in Paris. Fancy! Christmas all by myself in this big place! It is enough to make one shudder to think of. A run up to town with you will do me good, and as soon as these fellows are gone I will see about it."

Captain Dorsay did not let Sir Wilfrid change his mind. In his clever and insidious way he was constantly recurring to the prospect, and painting it in the most glowing colours, until the young Baronet wondered how he had ever managed to exist without such a resource. Jack Dorsay did not let the grass grow under his feet either in another direction. Cards naturally formed—in the absence of the ladies—the usual evening's amusement at Lambscote Hall, and it was wonderful to see what luck Sir Wilfrid had, and what a heap of money he managed to win from Captain Dorsay. Indeed, he grew quite unhappy on the subject at last, knowing his friend's circumstances, and begged him, privately, to take it back again. But Dorsay laughed—in that honest way of his that showed all his teeth—and told Sir Wilfrid not to make himself uncomfortable on that score, as he meant to win it all back again, and a great deal more into the bargain. And Wilfrid replied, with the utmost sincerity, that he heartily hoped he would.

As soon as the pheasants were slaughtered and his guests had taken their departure, he went up to London with Captain Dorsay, and settled himself there for the winter months.

Lady Ewell was not particularly pleased when she heard of the step her husband had taken. Bachelor chambers and absence from Lambscote sounded very like an attempt at freedom on his part, and Lady Otto showed no sympathy for her alarm.

"I told you how it would be, when you insisted upon accompanying me to Paris," she said to her daughter. "You had no right to leave your home at such a season, and Sir Wilfrid resents it by showing you that he also intends to take his

pleasure in his own way. You are playing a very foolish game, Lena, and you will live to repent it."

"How am I playing a foolish game?" demanded Lady Ewell, with a rising colour.

"By running after Captain Dorsay. Now, it's no use flaring out at me, my dear, because I see your hand as well as you do. You professed to be ill in London simply to stay and persuade him to join us here, and you see how much your persuasions are worth. He has never come, and now you refuse to return till after the new year, still in hopes that Christmas may bring him. But you'll be disappointed again, mark my words!"

"Perhaps as you are such an oracle, mamma, you will also tell me the reason of Captain Dorsay's non-appearance?" said Lady Ewell.

"Because he is tired of you, my dear, that's the reason. You played a very wrong card when you interfered with his flirtation with Rosie Ewell. I told you so at the time. You have wounded his vanity and he will never forgive you for it. It is the last thing a man ever does forgive. And my opinion is, that if you remain here till Doomsday, Captain Dorsay will not visit Paris."

"But where can he be? what can he be doing?" exclaimed Lena, chagrin almost moving her to tears.

"He is with your husband in London. General Westerley writes me word he met them together at the club last week. There they are carrying on in fine style, I have no doubt—turning night into day, and associating with all sorts of disreputable characters. I am not surprised at anything I hear of Captain Dorsay, but I must say I expected better things of Sir Wilfrid. But they're all alike. The General says everyone is talking about your husband being seen in such company. And the next thing I shall hear is that they are talking about *you*. It is really too bad. You have no right to leave Sir Wilfrid to go to rack and ruin in this way."

"I shall not leave him long," replied her daughter. "Another month cannot make much difference in the extent of his ruin, and I shall return to London with you after New Year's Day. But I will not go to Lambcote. I have taken a perfect hatred to the place, and nothing shall induce me to live there again."

CHAPTER XXVII.

FOUND.

ROSIE EWELL, in colouring photographs, had found her vocation. It does not sound like a very grand vocation, perhaps, but this story does not pretend to deal with geniuses or extraordinary people. What each worker should do is the work he can do best, and Rosie could colour photographs better than she could do anything else. She had no sense of composition, and very little of form, but she had an eye for colour, and a delicacy of touch which she found most useful in her new occupation.

Mr. Denham made her begin at the beginning, but she rapidly ascended the ladder. From "touching-up" the plain photographs she went on to "tinting" faces and hands, and thence rose to colouring the whole figure—an art in which she so greatly improved that the most finished portraits were soon entrusted to her care.

The labour was not all roses. What labour is? At first the pay was very small, and Rosie felt inclined to cry when she handed over her week's salary to Jane and knew it could not possibly cover the week's expenses. But by degrees her earnings increased, until her friend returned her half the sum to keep for herself.

It was a proud day for Rosie when that event occurred. She threw her arms round Jane Warner's neck, calling her "sister," and every tender name that she could think of, and blessing and thanking her for all she had done to help her and make her independent. For this goal wasn't reached until Rosie had been many months at Wolsey Cottage, and all that time Jane had worked laboriously for them both, even going so far as to take in plain needlework in order to make both ends meet, and prevent the extra expenses from being felt in their modest household.

But now it was over, and Rosie felt quite hurt because Jane refused to recoup herself for the previous outlay. The only consolation she had was in buying gorgeous tucked and

laced frocks for little toddling Nellie, and decking that small woman out in such smart sashes and sleeve-ribbons, that she hardly knew herself, and kept twisting round and round to try and see the wondrous streamers that fluttered at her back.

Mr. Denham, on finding out the progress made by Miss Fraser—for Jane insisted that Rosie should still maintain her *incognita*—transferred her to his Regent Street establishment, where the demand for highly finished portraits was greater than at Chelsea.

Jane consented to the new arrangement with some fears, but Rosie had none for herself. If she should meet any of her family, she averred, she did not care. No one should take her from her beloved Jane Warner, nor prevent her from supporting herself. Her mother and sisters had taunted her with not doing so. Well, she had done it, and they had no right to object. She was eighteen now, and beyond the age of coercion. She would rather like than otherwise to see their looks of righteous horror, if they entered the studio and caught her at her work. But that was very unlikely, as she occupied a room to herself. The only person, Rosie said with a quivering lip, that she did *not* want to meet was her darling Wilfrid, to which Jane, turning away, assented. And, of course, as is the order of things in this world, the first of her relations whom Rosie encountered was Wilfrid himself.

It was a March day, cold, dull, and winterly, and the girl was wondering whether she could accomplish any work on such a dark afternoon, when the proprietor of the studio—a brother of Mr. Denham's—came into her room with a *carte-de-visite* in his hand.

"Can you do anything with this, Miss Fraser?" he inquired. "The gentleman wants the head coloured for a locket, but I'm afraid it's too dark. I advised him to sit again, but he has no time—is in a hurry, and wants it at once. Can it be done?"

He placed the photograph in her hands. She recognised it at once. It was a portrait of her brother Wilfrid.

"Is the gentleman here?" she asked hurriedly.

"Yes; waiting to hear what you say."

"It is much too dark an impression. It won't be satisfactory," she answered, giving it back with a trembling hand.

"Very good, I'll tell him so," said Mr. Denham. But in another minute he had returned.

"The gentleman—it's Sir Wilfrid Ewell—says he will take the chance of its turning out a failure; but he wishes this particular *carte* coloured, and would like to speak to you about it. You must come downstairs and see him."

"I cannot; I am too busy," she answered brusquely.

"But, Miss, Fraser, I must insist," commenced the photographer.

"Am I intruding?" said a voice in the doorway, and her brother appeared upon the threshold.

Mr. Denham retreated in his favour.

"Ah, Sir Wilfrid! Now you can speak to the young lady yourself. Sir Wilfrid, Miss Fraser." And so saying, Mr. Denham went back to his own department.

Sir Wilfrid recognised her at once. Rosie had only to raise those dark grey eyes—so like his own—and fix a look upon him filled with emotion, for him to know his sister. But surprise for a moment mastered his powers of speech.

"Don't make a fuss about it, darling," said Rosie quietly, when she had found her voice. "It is I, indeed; and if you are angry to find me here, remember, it was my mother drove me to it."

"Rosie, my dearest sister! how could I be angry to find you, when your loss has been the trouble of my life? But what is this, dear? Are you obliged to work for your bread? Who are you living with? What are you doing? Oh, Rosie! do not be afraid of me, but tell me all."

He had closed the door by this time, and coming forward, folded her in his arms. And Rosie, feeling his kisses on her cheek, wondered for a moment how she could have had the heart to run away from him.

"I am not a bit afraid, dear Wilfrid; nor have I any reason to be ashamed. But you must let me go now, darling. Suppose Mr. Denham should come in and catch us kissing! I should be dismissed upon the spot."

They both laughed at that, and Rosie dried the tears that had risen to her eyes.

"Now that I have found you, Rosie, I will never let you go," said Sir Wilfrid.

"And I have no wish that you should, dear brother; for meeting you again makes me wonder how I can have lived

so long without a sight of your face or a sound of your voice. But you must not stay here now. Give me your orders about the photograph, and tell me where I can see you, and I will come as soon as my day's work is over."

"Oh, hang the photograph!" exclaimed Sir Wilfrid. "I don't want it now. All I want is you."

"But that will not be satisfactory for poor Mr. Denham," said Rosie. "May I tell him you will sit to him another day?"

"Say anything you like. But can't you come with me now?"

"No; it is impossible! Neither must you return for me. We don't want them to know that I'm your sister. Only say where I can see you, darling—*alone*, remember—and I will be there by five o'clock."

"You must come to my chambers, in Rochester Street. You remember the old place, don't you?"

"*Living in chambers*, Wilfrid! And where, then, is your wife?"

Sir Wilfrid's brows contracted with a frown.

"She is staying with her mother in Onslow Gardens. She prefers it to living with me. But I will tell you all about that when we have time to talk together. And you promise me *faithfully* to come to my chambers at five?"

"I promise you, dearest; and I shall be so impatient for the moment to arrive, that I do not know how I shall get through my work till then."

The reappearance of the photographer on the scene of action here forced Sir Wilfrid to tear himself away; and after promising to return and sit for his portrait, he left Rosie to think over the exciting interview she had passed through.

As soon as ever her day's task was completed, she hurried on her walking apparel and took her way to the Adelphi.

She was rather nervous as she approached Rochester Street. Her brother had so evidently given up his acquaintance with the Warners, that she was afraid he might be vexed to find she was living with them; but she meant to do battle for her friends, all the same, with every power of argument she possessed.

Sir Wilfrid had asked her to give her own name to his servants, to avoid any scandal; and as soon as the valet, who

answered the door to her, heard it, he ushered her without ceremony into his master's sitting-room, where she found Wilfrid seated before a blazing fire, and beside a table laid out with every luxury suitable to an afternoon tea.

As soon as the door was closed behind her, and they found themselves alone, the brother and sister flew into each other's arms.

"And now, Rosie," exclaimed Sir Wilfrid, when their rapture at their re-union had somewhat abated, "the first thing you must do is *to eat*. I won't hear another word, nor answer a question, till you have had your tea. Here is some very tolerable bread and butter (considering Harvey cut it), and some first-rate Dalmani—I can vouch for the excellence of the Dalmani, because I tried it at luncheon. And what is this? Oh! a cold game-pie. And here is some guava jelly (you girls are always ready for sweets), and seed-cake, and——"

"Stop, stop, Wilfrid!" cried Rosie, laughing; "you talk as if I had had nothing to eat since we parted. I have not been starved, I assure you, dear, and I had my dinner later than usual to-day, so that I would rather wait a little—if it is all the same to you—before I take my tea."

She had removed her hat and cloak by this time, and now stood up before the glass, and ruffled her bonny brown hair becomingly with her hands.

"You are prettier than ever, Rosie," said her brother admiringly; "and I really think you have grown. But now tell me *everything*, dear. I am burning to hear where you have been all this time. You are alone, Rosie, I hope? You are not *married*?"

The brightness died out of her laughing eyes.

"No, Wilfrid. I am not married, nor do I think I ever shall be. I have seen too much of the effects of marriage on my friends. It seems to me it is better left alone."

"But what made you leave us all in so mysterious and extraordinary a way, dear? You don't know the misery and anxiety you have caused me."

"Dear old boy!" said the girl affectionately. "And you were the only one I grieved after, too. The reason I went was this, Wilfrid. You know I told you it was impossible for me to live at Lambcote. Don't let us allude to that question again. It is settled, once and for ever. But mamma

insisted that I should do so. She called me ungrateful and disobedient, and said I was a burthen, and all sorts of hard things, and threatened to take me back to Somersetshire herself. And so I ran away. The money you had given me kept me until I got work, and since I obtained that I have kept myself. There is my whole history, Wilfrid. A very simple one, with nothing in the background. You need not be ashamed of me, brother. I have done nothing to disgrace my birth or breeding. And—except for not seeing you—I have been tolerably happy.”

“But for a child like you, Rosie, to live alone, and work for yourself! It is incomprehensible, and it is very dangerous. But it must end at once. Now that we have met again you will let me place you above all necessity of labour.”

“Dear Wilfrid, I have told you I will *never* return to Lambscote Hall.”

“Then I will make you an allowance sufficient for your wants.”

“I do not wish that, either. I am perfectly contented, and have everything I require.”

“How independent you have grown! Is it possible this life pleases you better than the one to which you were brought up?”

“That is not the question, Wilfrid. The truth is, that whilst Lena is your wife, your money belongs to her equally with yourself, and I would not accept a crust of bread at her hands.”

“You are still very hard upon Lena, Rosie.”

“I am what her own conduct has made me,” replied the girl shortly. After a pause, she went on—“Listen to me, dear Wilfrid. You cannot suppose that I should have taken the step I did, and adhered to it, without a good reason. I am thankful to be able to support myself, and I have been fortunate in finding kind friends to help me; but work is not always sweet, and you cannot suppose my home is as comfortable and luxurious as the one I left. Still, I am quite resolved not to relinquish it. Nothing would induce me to return to Surbiton, where my presence is regarded as an incubus, nor to Lambscote, whilst Lena reigns there. And as Lena’s life is as good as my own, my only prospect is remaining as I am. Don’t try to dissuade me from it, Wilfrid. If you think I am a disgrace to the family, you need not

notice me again, for I would not be a cause of annoyance to you for the world. But I will neither live with you nor be supported by you. I am eighteen years old, free in the eyes of the law to do as I choose in the matter, and I choose to remain as I am."

"I have listened to you quietly, Rosie," said Sir Wilfrid, "and now you must listen to me. You were surprised when I told you I was living in chambers. The fact is, my wife and I do not get on very well together. I don't know how it is, or why, but she seems to have got tired of me, though, God knows, I have done everything in my power to please her. She declares she hates the country, and refuses to return to it. She has been with her mother ever since last October. She went first to Paris with her, and since their return she has taken up her abode in Onslow Gardens. I am nothing and nobody. Lena wants me to take a house in London for her, and live here all the year round. But I cannot afford to do it. My income is all needed to keep up the Hall as it should be, and I can't let the family estate go to ruin. So my wife and I are at odds just now, and I think it very probable that it will end in our living apart; she with her mother—since she prefers her to me—and I at Lambscote."

"And will that trouble you much, dear Wilfrid?"

"It *has* troubled me deeply, Rosie, but the pain is almost past now. Lena has shown herself to be so selfish and so unloving that she has cooled my former regard for her. One cannot run all one's life after a shadow," he ended, with a sad smile.

"It's a pity she ever proved to be anything more than a shadow," replied his sister bluntly.

"If what I anticipate comes to pass, Rosie, I shall return to Lambscote after the season *alone*. And in that case you will not refuse to come and keep house for me, will you?"

"Yes, dear, I shall. Don't think me unkind, but so long as your wife lives she will have the option of occupying the same house as yourself, and I cannot run the risk of being turned out a second time. Wilfrid, dearest, there is no one in this world I love so much as you!" *Do* believe me then, when I say that if this thing were possible, I would do it. But it is not."

"All right, Rosie! I will not ask you again. I have made a great mistake in life, and I must bear the consequences of it by myself. But, at all events, you will not deny me the occasional pleasure and comfort of your society. You mentioned just now that you had found good friends in London. Who are they? Where are you living, and with whom?"

At this question, which Rosie had foreseen that sooner or later she must answer, she coloured painfully. She was so afraid her brother would think she had been doubly false to him, in flying to the house of the very person whose name he had forbidden her to mention. So for a moment she was silent.

"Surely, Rosie, you are not *ashamed* to tell me?"

The doubt conveyed by these words made her brave again.

"*Ashamed!* I should think not. I am only too proud of my friends, and all that they have done for me. Fancy, Wilfrid, people so poor as to have to work for their own bread, taking me in when I threw myself on their protection, without a word of remonstrance, without a question as to whether I should ever be able to contribute my share towards the family expenses. Fancy their sheltering me then and there, receiving me into the house as a sister or a daughter, supporting me until I was able to support myself, nursing me in sickness, comforting me in sorrow, and asking nothing, positively *nothing*, in return!"

"I can hardly fancy it, Rosie. Such open-handed kindness is beyond the imagination of the nineteenth century."

"But it is *true*—every word of it is true. She has been the dearest friend and sister to me that an unhappy girl was fortunate enough to light upon. She has taught me how to bear my trouble, and where to look for comfort. She has borne with my fits of impatience, with my——"

"*She—she—who is she?* demanded Sir Wilfrid, with a smile. "I thought I owed my debt of gratitude to a whole family, Rosie, but they seem to have dwindled down into one."

"They *are* a family," replied the girl, more composedly. "There is her mother, and Miss Prosser, and little Nellie. But the friend I spoke of, the one who has been all the world to me, Wilfrid, since you saw me last, is the daughter of your old landlady, *Jane Warner*."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MEMORY.

FOR a moment Rosie Ewell was almost frightened at the effect which this name seemed to have upon her brother. As she pronounced it he rose suddenly from the chair on which he was sitting, and stood gazing at her with a fixed countenance, as if he could not believe that he had heard aright. Then the dark blood came pouring over his handsome face in a torrent of shame, until his very eyes-balls were suffused with it. He was suffering an agony of suspense. With the unexpected knowledge that his sister had been living for nearly two years with the woman he had deserted, came the conviction that she must know *all*—Jane would surely have told her. For men cannot believe that where their hearts are concerned women are as reticent as themselves. He could not find a voice in which to express his surprise. He could only murmur, "*Jane!—Jane Warner!*" under his breath, as if the intelligence were too wonderful to believe. Rosie mistook his emotion for anger. She remembered how Jane had told her that Wilfrid and she had *once* been the dearest friends, and how they should never be friends in this world again; and she felt that nothing but a very serious quarrel could have separated them so entirely. But that happened long ago, and Jane seemed very contented now. And perhaps *she* might be the means of bringing them together again, and Wilfrid would learn to be contented too. At all events she meant to try.

"Dear Wilfrid," she commenced, "you are not angry with me, are you? I know that you had some misunderstanding with Jane, and forbade me to mention her name in your hearing, but that was so long ago, you must surely have forgotten it now. And she has been *so* good to me—I cannot tell you all her goodness. She is an angel, if ever there was one."

"And you have been living all this time with *Jane Warner*,

at Chelsea?" he said, passing his hand over his brow, like a man in a dream. "It is incredible!"

"Indeed I have, at Wolsey Cottage, and I have been so well cared for! I went straight to Jane, Wilfrid—I wonder it never struck you that I should—who else had I to go to? You know what a fancy I took to her sweet, good face the first time we met, and it did not belie her. She has been both mother and sister to me."

Sir Wilfrid seemed suddenly to come back to himself, like a man awaking from sleep. His torpor passed away, and he grew eager and excited. He sat down again, and drew his chair closer to Rosie's.

"Tell me all about her," he said earnestly. "How is Jane, and how does the old cottage look? Is her mother still alive, and in what circumstances are they? They were very kind to me once, Rosie—as kind, perhaps, as they have been to you—and I am ungrateful to have forgotten them so long. Does Jane ever mention me to you? Does she think I am unkind?"

"What a string of questions," laughed Rosie, delighted to mark the change in her brother's manner; "give me a little time, Wilfrid, and I will try and answer them all. How is Jane? you ask. Well! she is all right as far as her health is concerned, and her temper was always sweet and equable, you know. But I think she has grown very old and steady in the last two years, and Miss Prosser says so too."

"Who is Miss Prosser? The old woman who used to live with them and go out teaching?"

"Yes! but she doesn't teach much now. She is more a companion for Mrs. Warner. She thinks Jane is very much changed. She never laughs or gets merry; and she doesn't care much for anything, not even the garden. She spends all her time looking after Nellie."

"Who is Nellie?"

"A child they have the care of—a dear little thing—and Jane just worships her. She never goes out except with the child. She won't go to theatres, or concerts, or anywhere. Mr. Cobble gets us lots of tickets, but I have to go with Miss Prosser."

"*Cobble! Cobble!* I remember that name! Wasn't he there in my time?"

"I dare say—indeed, I'm sure he *must* have been, because

he has lived with them for three years. He is a young doctor, and he's awfully in love with Jane. Oh! he *does* worry her so."

"*In love with Jane!*" cried Sir Wilfrid, starting. "Does he want to marry her?"

"Of course he does; and Miss Prosser is very angry with Jane, because she won't make up her mind. He's great fun. He writes her a proposal every Sunday, and sends it down with the money for his weekly bill on Monday."

"Absurd nonsense!" exclaimed her brother testily, "turning a serious matter into a jest. Just like one of those hospital cads."

"But I assure you Mr. Cobble is *not* a cad, Wilfrid. He's a very gentlemanly young fellow, and his name is the worst thing about him. I wish Jane *would* have him, for they say he will be very well off some day."

"Jane Warner can't—I mean she is not at all likely to marry," interposed Sir Wilfrid; "that is, if she is anything like what she was when I knew her."

"I don't think she is likely, but if she marries anyone it will be Mr. Cobble. He is so generous. He bought her a lovely ring last week."

"D——n his impudence!" muttered the Baronet.

"But she wouldn't take it," continued Rosie, "so he threw it over the garden wall. Wasn't it a pity?"

"I have no doubt he went round and picked it up afterwards. Medical students are not in the habit of wasting rings," sneered her brother. "But does Jane ever mention *me*?"

"*Never!* unless it is to warn me."

"How to warn you?"

"Against doing anything that may displease you, Wilfrid. Sometimes she says 'Your brother might not like it,' or 'Your brother might disapprove,' but that is all. She made me take the name of 'Fraser' in order to save you from annoyance. Jane is always thinking of others instead of herself."

"And—and they are pretty comfortable. There is no want in the household, Rosie?"

"Oh no, we rub on very well!" replied the girl cheerfully.

"We emulate the philosophy of Sam Weller, and can eat our

boiled mutton without caper sauce. We are too busy to fuss over trifles, Wilfrid."

"Rosie," said her brother, after a pause, "I suppose I can come and see you at Wolsey Cottage?"

"You ought to be able to answer that question for yourself, dear. I know of no objection, if you don't. But perhaps it would be better to ask Jane's leave first."

"Will you ask her for me?"

"What am I to say?"

"That I want to visit you sometimes. That will be sufficient."

"Won't you say you want to make it up with her?"

"I can't say that, because we have had no quarrel."

"Why have you left off visiting her, then?"

"Because—because it was best for both of us. But now that I have been married so long, and the past is almost forgotten, she may not mind, perhaps, meeting me again."

"Very well," said Rosie, rising; "I will ask her, and tell you what she says."

She thought she had solved the riddle now. Jane had been smitten by the charms of Wilfrid, but Wilfrid had not responded, and so he had thought it best to see her no more. But what a blind fool he must have been not to recognise the superiority of Jane Warner over Lena St. Blase! As she put her arms round his neck and wished him good-bye, she could not help giving utterance to her feelings.

"Oh, you *goose*!" she ejaculated; "you silly, silly goose!"

"What for, Rosie?" asked Sir Wilfrid.

"To have married that odious woman, when you might have had Jane Warner! I see it all now—the cause of your separation and everything else. She loved you, and you could not return her love. My poor darling Jane! Why, you couldn't have found a better, sweeter wife in the whole world than she would have been to you."

The Baronet grew crimson under the agitation of fencing off this fresh attack.

"Indeed! *indeed*, Rosie! you are mistaken. Pray do not say anything of that sort to Jane, or I shall never be able to enter the house again. She never was in love with me, nor I with her. Our parting had nothing to do with that. We were the best of friends, but——"

"You cannot deceive me with your *friendship*," said Rosie archly, as she turned to leave. "Well, dear brother, I feel a thousand times happier than I did this morning for having met you again, and hope you will come and see me very often at Chelsea. But don't tell me that my Jane was not in love with you, for I know better."

The Baronet sat at his window after she had left him, thinking over what she had said.

It was a very pleasant window to sit at, even in the month of March, for it overlooked the Thames, and the great river was alive with steamboats and barges. But Sir Wilfrid saw little of what was passing before him. His mind was filled with the pleasure of having met his sister again, and the food which her words had given him to ruminate upon. Jane, grown old and steady; Jane, never laughing, nor caring for anything in the way of pleasure; Jane, never mentioning his name, and yet impressing her companion with the conviction that she loved him. All these ideas flitted like phantasmagoria through his brain, and kept him riveted to the same spot, silent and immovable. His personal attendant, Harvey, entered the room with a stealthy step, and an apologetic air.

"What do you want?" demanded his master testily.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Wilfrid, but it's seven o'clock, sir, and I thought, perhaps, as you ordered me to lay out your evening suit, that——"

"I was engaged to dine with Captain Dorsay at the club. Very true. But I shan't go. I'm tired. Take a cab, and go and make my excuses to him. You'll find him at Morley's. Say I've a headache—say anything—only I dine at home to-night."

"Very good, Sir Wilfrid. And at what time, sir?"

"Oh, no time! I shan't dine. I don't want any dinner. Get out of the room, do, and leave me to myself."

The well-trained valet retired without a word, and only concluded in his own mind that *something was up*.

Then the Baronet settled down again into his seat, and sat through the March gloaming—thinking. How vividly, even through that wintry dusk, he could conjure up the glories of a bygone day! The summer evening on which he met Jane Warner first, when he arrived in London, a raw boy from school, knowing no one, and fain, when his day's toil at Somerset House was over, to remain in the rooms his father

had chosen for him. What a fair, sweet, stately maiden she had seemed to him, with her childlike smile and blush, and the abnormal gravity that stole over her countenance as she recalled the cares of housekeeping that devolved upon her. He remembered the shyness with which she had first granted him admittance to her cherished garden, and the gratitude she evinced for his assistance in training her roses and Virginian creepers. How keenly the sight of his sister, and her allusions to his old home, had raked up these almost forgotten memories in his heart! The big bed of lilies under the southern wall. It was there he had given Jane his first kiss, and heard her confess how dear he was to her. Sir Wilfrid wondered if she ever thought of it when she passed that bed of lilies now. And did she still wear the ring with which he had married her—or thought he had married her, said the Baronet to himself, anxious to exonerate his conscience-stricken heart from blame—a ring of twisted gold, which he had chosen to avert suspicion.

Well, well! it mattered little what she did or did not do. The past was past, and they were no longer one. And yet, with all its illegality, their union had felt very much like a marriage to him, and he could not readily divest himself of the habit of regarding her as his wife. She *had* been his wife—there was no doubt of that—and very happy days they were that they two had spent together before this accursed money had come to separate them. Yes, Sir Wilfrid had actually said "*accursed money*," before he recognised the blasphemy of which he was guilty. For he had been very happy without it—happier, he confessed to himself, looking back on the feverish anxiety and disappointment of the last two years, than he had been since its possession. Jane, in her print-dress—her only ornament the ring of twisted gold; her only beautifier the look of love that irradiated her countenance—was a very pleasing picture to contemplate even through the vistas of memory. How she had worshipped him in those early days! Nay, could he recall a time when she had *not* seemed to do so? Her affection for him (owing perhaps to the secrecy of their union) had always been rather reticent and retiring, but it had never failed to manifest itself when an occasion arose requiring it. From the day when he had bade her follow him to the altar and marry him under an assumed name, to the hour when he had told her her marriage was a lie,

and she had no claim upon him as a wife, Jane Warner had ever appeared in the same character, as a noble-hearted, generous, loving woman, ready to sacrifice herself for his sake. And he had left her! He had let her go! The deep-drawn sigh of regret that accompanied the thought was not complimentary to Lady Ewell. It served, however, to rouse Sir Wilfrid from his reverie, and show him the precipice on which he stood.

It was worse than useless in him to encourage a morbid repentance for the past. For of one thing he was certain—it was irrevocable. He had ruptured the link between Jane and himself, and it would never be riveted together again. She was too proud—had too much respect for her own dignity. They could never meet each other except as friends. But in that capacity was it not in his power still to serve her? It seemed hard that two people, who had been all in all to one another, should be proscribed from touching hands in token of good fellowship. Surely, the rules of morality were not so stringent as all that. He should never wish to make love to her again—naturally—with Lena as his wife. But he thought it must be his duty still to see that she had everything she required to make her life comfortable. Rosie had not spoken very confidently on the subject of their *ménage*, and doubtless there was some little struggle to make ends meet in Wolsey Cottage. For his sister's sake—if not for Jane's—he would be justified in offering his assistance. And if he could only be friends again with Jane Warner, and feel that he was of use to her—so Sir Wilfrid argued—he was sure he should be happier. To be allowed to visit at Chelsea—to run in and out of the old door as he felt inclined—(how familiar it would seem to him to do so!)—to see Jane's eyes brighten and her cheeks flush at his approach—to spend the summer evenings in the garden with the girls, and know that he left them brighter and happier for his visit—what a ray of sunshine this would infuse in his somewhat darkened lot!

Finally, Sir Wilfrid arrived at the conclusion that it was the most fortunate coincidence possible that Rosie had taken up her quarters with the Warners, and might be the means of putting things straight again. He argued with the selfishness of a man. He did not stay to consider that with Jane Warner *things* could never be *put straight again*, but that she was doomed to bear the scars his perfidy had left upon her to

the grave. To meet her once more, however, to hear her say that they were friends, and she was content it should be so, would ease his conscience, and leave him no space to question if she spoke the truth or only deceived him in order to maintain her dignity. The dreams of Arcadian simplicity in which he indulged were all evoked for his own gratification, and for the remedy of the discomfort he had imposed upon himself. He had settled the whole matter to his satisfaction before he went to bed, and was quite eager to see what news the morning's post would bring him. But the postman came backwards and forwards for many days before he brought the permission which Sir Wilfrid so confidently looked for.



CHAPTER XXIX.

AGAIN.

WHEN Rosie reached Chelsea on the evening of her interview with her brother, fully two hours after her usual time, she found the little family at Wolsey Cottage like a disturbed ant-hill. The tea was waiting on the parlour-table; Mrs. Warner was silently weeping because no one would attend to her entreaties to be allowed to begin; Caroline was oscillating between the kitchen and the passage; Miss Prosser peering through the fog from the hall-door step, and Jane anxiously pacing up and down the pavement in front of the house. As soon as she caught sight of Rosie's figure she rushed towards her.

"Oh, my child! where *have* you been? I have been frightened to death on your account! I couldn't think what had occurred. Do you know that it is nearly nine o'clock. You have given us a most terrible fright."

"My dearest Jane, I *am* so sorry; but I know you will forgive me when you hear the cause. I have been detained by—by——"

"By Mr. Denham?" inquired Jane eagerly.

"Yes, by Mr. Denham," replied Rosie, blushing through the fog for the falsehood of which she was guilty, but anxious not to enter into further explanations before Miss Prosser.

"Then I am very angry with Mr. Denham!" exclaimed Jane determinately, "and I shall take care to tell him so. He has no right to keep you over time. It was expressly stipulated, when he engaged you, that your working hours were to be from ten till five. I won't have you worked like a galley-slave, Rosie, nor sent home at an hour like this! It's not fit that you should come through the streets by yourself at this time of night. You might be spoken to. I shall go with you to Regent Street to-morrow morning, and speak to Mr. Denham myself about it."

"Oh, don't worry yourself, dear Jane! Here I am, you see, safe and sound, wind and limb, and none the worse for a

little fog. How I wish you hadn't waited tea for me, though. The dear old mother must be famished !"

"And what must *you* be, my child, going without food since one o'clock. But Caroline has a chop all hot and ready for you in the kitchen."

Rosie coloured. She had eaten an excellent meal before she had left the Adelphi, and couldn't have swallowed the chop if she had been paid for it.

"Indeed, Jane, I cannot eat it. I am not at all hungry."

"Not hungry, dear? Did Mr. Denham give you any tea, then?"

"No—only—yes, I had something, just a mouthful. Anyway, I am not hungry, now."

"Overwork has taken away your appetite," remarked Miss Prosser.

But Jane, who was regarding the girl steadfastly, saw her colour rise, and guessed that that was not the cause.

"You will tell me by-and-by?" she whispered, as she passed by Rosie's chair.

"I will always tell you everything," replied the other, with a fervent kiss and squeeze.

Then the time seemed long to both of them, until they could escape to their own room together.

Jane was prepared to hear the account of some silly love-affair or flirtation from her young companion, and when the revelation was made, it struck her like a sudden blow.

"Can't you *guess*?" cried Rosie, as they entered their chamber, and found themselves alone; "can't you *guess*, Jane, what kept me so late to-day?"

"No, darling, not in the slightest degree. But I hope it has nothing to do with a man. You must never forget your birth and position, Rosie, though others may mistake it, and remember that no gentleman asks a young lady to walk with him, or go anywhere with him, until he has been introduced to her friends."

"But it *is* a man, and a very nice one too," cried the girl gleefully, "and he wishes to be introduced to my friends, and visit me at Wolsey Cottage."

"Oh, Rosie, Rosie!" said Jane reproachfully. "Have you been walking about with a stranger?"

"No, I haven't, you dear old grannie. He came to the studio this morning about a photograph, and we made great

friends, and he asked me to go and have tea at his chambers, so I went."

"My dear, that is a thousand times worse!" exclaimed Jane, in a voice of horror. "You do not know what harm might come of it. How did he *dare* to ask you such a thing, and you to accede to it? Oh! if you only knew the danger—if I could only tell you——" But here Jane's voice became choked with emotion, and she was unable to proceed.

"Dear Jane," said Rosie, still teasing her, "he's awfully nice. And I want *you* to be friends with him too, for my sake."

"Then let him come here like a man and say so openly," cried Jane indignantly, "and not go leading an innocent child like you astray. Oh! Rosie! Rosie! *promise* me you will never do so again."

"Humph," said Rosie, "that's rather difficult. It depends upon whether you will let him come here, Jane. He can't come without your permission, can he?"

"If he is an honourable man and wishes to court you honourably, you know that he is welcome to see you in your own home."

"But will *you* be friends with him, Jane?"

"How can I tell before I know him? I cannot make a friend of everybody."

"But he is so anxious to be your friend. He will not come to Wolsey Cottage without. And you were his friend once, Jane. Will you not try to be so again?"

Jane looked startled. But she did not in the least understand what Rosie was driving at.

"I was his friend *once*? Do I know him then? What is his name, Rosie?"

"His name is Wilfrid Ewell. *Now* do you understand? And oh, Jane! he is so *very sorry* that there has been a coolness between you, and he is afraid to come here till you say he may. And you *will* say it, darling, won't you?"

The suddenness of this news was almost too much for the equanimity of Jane Warner. She did not exhibit her surprise as Sir Wilfrid had done; the man was too constantly in her thoughts for that. But she became very pale—almost lividly pale—and turning her face away from the scrutiny of her companion, professed to busy herself in hushing little Nellie in her bed.

"Where did you meet him?" she inquired presently, and in so calm a voice that Rosie was quite astonished at her indifference.

"He came to Denham's studio, as I said. I have not told you any stories about it, Jane. He wanted a photograph coloured, and they brought him up to my room. Fancy my amazement, darling! I thought I should have tumbled through the floor. And Wilfrid was almost as bad. But we had hardly a moment together, with people popping in and out every minute, and so he asked me to come to his chambers as soon as I was free. And there was no harm in going to my own brother's, Janie, was there?"

"No—no, dear. But—in *chambers*?"

"Ah! that is the sad part of it, Janie. Lena and he can't agree. I was sure they never would. You don't know what a horrid woman she is. And Wilfrid says she is living with her mother, Lady Otto St. Blase, and he thinks it is very likely they will never live together again. A good riddance for him I should say, but I'm afraid he doesn't think so. He seemed very miserable. But of course he was delighted to see *me* again—the dear fellow! Oh, how he did kiss and hug me! I felt such a wretch for having lived here all this time and never told him where I was."

"Did you tell him now?"

"Of course I did; and you should have seen his face when he heard it. I'm sure he's awfully fond of you all, Jane, and he does *so* want to be friends again with you. He asked me a lot of questions about you and your mother, and Miss Prosser, and said he was afraid you must think him ungrateful, but he has had so much to do and to worry him the last two years. And you *will* ask him to come and see us, won't you, Jane?"

"No, Rosie, I *cannot*!"

"Oh, Jane! I did not think you would be so unkind."

"It is impossible, my dear. You must not ask me again. And I do not believe your brother would come if I did."

"Yes, he would. I am sure he would. He proposed it himself. He wants to see me sometimes, of course, and how can he see me any other way? And after two years' separation, and all the trouble I have gone through, I do—I do—*so* much—want—the—the—comfort of his society!" exclaimed Rosie, bursting into tears.

"Oh, Rosie! don't make my task so extra hard," said Jane, in a broken voice.

At that sound the younger girl recovered herself.

"Jane dear, tell me the truth! *What* was it that separated you and Wilfrid?"

"You must ask him. I cannot tell you."

"Will it never be healed again? Is it quite impossible?"

"Quite impossible. The best remedy is never to speak of it."

"But if it were for his good—his comfort—wouldn't you see him then?"

"I don't think so—I cannot tell. Just now I feel that I can never meet him again in this world."

"You are more unforgiving than he is, Jane."

"Perhaps so. God knows. I am only telling you the truth."

"It is a very bitter truth. It will make me sorry that I ever came here," replied Rosie, as she got into her bed.

It was the unkindest thing her lips had ever uttered to Jane, and the latter felt it very keenly. Long after Rosie had fallen to sleep she lay awake, wondering how she should act in the matter. Had she become indifferent to Sir Wilfrid Ewell—had she learned to look on him as the lawful husband of another woman—the struggle to know right from wrong would not have been so hard within her breast. But in her heart she believed him to be *hers*—hers in the sight of God and Heaven—wrested from her only through a wretched legal quibble, of which no honourable man would have taken advantage. She did not regard him as bound to Lena St. Blase; she did not even think of her as Lady Ewell. The title was her own, the man was her own—her husband, who had plighted his faith to her before God's altar—and to receive him in that house as the husband of another woman was more than she had strength to bear. Jane watered the golden head of little Nellie, lying on her arm, with tears, as these thoughts passed through her brain. But softer ones succeeded them. He was unhappy and disappointed. He longed for the comfort of his sister's society. Had she the right to deprive him of it? He would not come very often, perhaps. Surely, during the few hours he might pass in the cottage it would be easy for her to keep out of his way. Had Jane Warner enter-

tained the least suspicion that Wilfrid loved her still, she would have foreseen the danger of their meeting. But she did not. Her nature could not conceive it possible that anything short of complete and entire indifference—if not dislike—could make a man give up the woman he had lived with as a wife in favour of another. And being sure of him she felt quite sure of herself, especially as she did not design to meet him.

But it took her some days to arrive at this decision. Rosie went forth to her work with red and swollen eyes the following morning, and with decided rebellion in her heart against what seemed to her Jane's cruelty and injustice.

But between two such friends a coolness could not be maintained for long. Before night they had kissed and cried and made it up again, and Peace brooded over their slumbers. And after the lapse of a few days Jane told Rosie, very gravely, that she had considered the matter and come to the conclusion to give Sir Wilfrid leave to visit at the cottage. But she did not wish the permission to be extended as a favour from herself. She preferred her name being left out of the matter altogether. She desired Rosie to write to her brother and ask him to come and see her, without reference to anyone but themselves, and with the sole proviso that he should let her know when he was coming.

Rosie was overjoyed at the intelligence, and was beginning to declare that she was sure everything would come right at last, when Jane checked her by saying :

"Do not let us waste our time in talking of impossibilities, Rosie. I have something of greater importance to ask you. You have been known to my mother and Miss Prosser only as Miss Fraser. But it will not do for Sir Wilfrid to visit you until they have been informed that he is your brother. What shall we say to them?"

"Just the truth, dear—nothing less. Perhaps it will be as well for me to go on working at the studio under the name of Fraser, otherwise I don't care now who knows my name or my address. I told Wilfrid he might tell the Surbiton people if he chose. Fancy, if my right reverend mamma and my four sisters were to come bearing down upon us! But there's no chance of that. They will be too

much ashamed of having a relation who works for her bread. And so long as I see my darling Wilfrid I care for nobody else, except you. Oh, Jane, dear! I *am* so much obliged to you. I'd like to kiss you to death for your goodness.

"I hope it may prove for the best, dear," said Jane, with a sigh, as she went about her domestic duties.

As soon as Rosie had had this conversation, she sat down and wrote, as she had been desired, to her brother, and Sir Wilfrid was as pleased to receive the letter as she was to despatch it.

There was no mention of the Warners in it from beginning to end; but he knew his sister would not have written the invitation without first asking their leave, and he accepted it as a calumet of peace from the hand of Jane. He felt quite merry when he had read that letter—quite anxious to accept the offer it contained at once. However, he contented himself with sitting down and making an appointment for the following evening, and then he went to his club, and astonished everybody there by his unusual spirits and unexpected mirth. On the next day he found the hours drag fearfully till six o'clock, when he dressed himself with the utmost care and set out for Chelsea.

Wilfrid Ewell of Somerset House had never been able to appear as Sir Wilfrid Ewell of Lambcote, turned out by the best tailors in London, did, yet there had been a buoyant look about the Government clerk that did more to set him off than all the Bond Street suits of the wealthy baronet. Sir Wilfrid had not grown older in appearance, perhaps, and he was certainly not less handsome than in the old days; but there was a careworn, haggard look about him that had never been there before. He trembled when his cab drew up at the gate of Wolsey Cottage, and he believed that in another moment he should stand face to face with Jane Warner. But his emotion was premature. No one opened the door to him but Caroline.

As her homely face was presented to his view, he could not help thinking of the beaming, intelligent countenance that had been wont to appear whenever those portals unclosed to him in former times. She stared at him when he gave her his name as if she had never seen a gentleman before, and ushered him into the dining-room, where his

sister was waiting to receive him. She rose full of delight at his appearance, and they greeted each other with the same effusiveness they had displayed before. Then they sat down together, and discussed their family matters, and everything that had occurred to them since they saw each other last. But there was a constraint between them, something kept back, which made them both ill at ease, and would not be kept back for ever.

Sir Wilfrid inquired after Mrs. Warner and Miss Prosser, after the parrot and the cat, after everything, in fact, that he did not care for, and nothing that he did. At last he jumped up impatiently.

"Let us go and have a turn round the garden!" he exclaimed. "I used to love the old garden in my 'green sallet' days. Many a day's work have I done in it, training the creepers and potting the slips. Come, Rosie, this room is too hot for comfort. Come and have a look at the lilies!"

"At the lilies, you stupid boy! Do you forget that it is only March? The lilies will not be out for another month. Their leaves are only just beginning to show above the ground."

"Never mind," he said, dragging her along, "we will go and look at the winter flowers, if it is too early for the spring ones."

But the old garden was deserted, bleak, and bare. The snowdrops and crocuses in the borders were the only flowers visible, and they were not worth looking at in the grey veil of dusk. Sir Wilfrid had soon had enough of the garden.

"It is chilly," he observed, "and you may catch cold. The fireside is the best place, after all, on these March evenings. But where are the family gone to? I expected to see Mrs. Warner and Miss Prosser."

"Miss Prosser has gone to a missionary meeting, I think," replied Rose timidly, "and has taken Mrs. Warner with her. The old mother loves a meeting. She doesn't understand a word that is said, but she likes to hear people talk. She is such a dear old lady when you come to know her. So gentle and affectionate, and grateful. I am very fond of her."

"Yes; I remember she was a harmless old thing," replied her brother.

Then there was silence between them. They had exhausted their topics of conversation, and a restraint seemed to fall upon them. Sir Wilfrid took out his watch.

"By George!" he exclaimed; "nine o'clock! And I have an appointment for half-past eight. I wonder how soon a hansom will take me to Hanover Square. I suppose I shall find one round the corner.

"I think there is a stand there," replied his sister in a disappointed voice.

Then, as she accompanied him to the door, she said:

"Wilfrid, dear, Jane says there can be no harm in my going to your chambers sometimes—so you will let me come, won't you? It is such a pleasure to see you!"

"Of course, dear; whenever you like," he replied in an abstracted manner. And then, as if the idea had only just occurred to him, he added, "By the way, where *is* Jane?"

"I don't know, Wilfrid. I think she must have gone out. I heard her tell Caroline at tea-time that she was engaged to spend the evening with Mrs. Martin."

"And who the devil is Mrs. Martin?" exclaimed Sir Wilfrid impatiently.

"Only our next-door neighbour—a very nice lady; but I am sure if Jane had thought——"

"There is no need for her to think anything," said the baronet, as he hurried down the garden-path without making any appointment for a future meeting.

Rosie dried her eyes as she closed the door after him. The visit, to which she had looked forward with such expectation, had not proved so great a success after all.

And whilst these events had been passing below, Jane Warner had been in her own room, with the door locked against all intruders, weeping passionately over the bed of the sleeping child.



CHAPTER XXX.

MEETING.

AFTER the lapse of a few hours Sir Wilfrid's vanity was quite ready to make him believe that the fact of his not having seen Jane on the occasion of his first visit to Chelsea was merely attributable to accident. Or, perhaps, that the poor girl's emotion at the idea of meeting him again was so great, that she could not trust herself to do so without further preparation.

But when weeks elapsed without his encountering her—when he had paid three and four visits to the cottage and Jane had never once appeared in the sitting-room, he could no longer lay that flattering unction to his soul. He saw that her avoidance of him was intentional, and he grew moody and restless in consequence.

Rosie was scarcely less disappointed than her brother. She never had a plausible excuse to make for her friend's absence. She never had any given to her. All she knew was that Jane was away—gone to a neighbour's, gone to a meeting, gone to church—gone anywhere in fact, to prevent herself coming in contact with the man who had been her husband.

At last Sir Wilfrid confided his trouble to Rosie, and enlisted her aid.

"It is nonsense Jane Warner and I playing at hide-and-seek in this manner," he said. "Can't you think of some plan to bring us together without compromising yourself, Rosie? If I could only see her and speak to her, I am sure it would be all right. But it will be impossible for me to go on visiting here as an intruder, whom the mistress of the house refuses to recognise. It must be one or the other, Rosie. Either I must be friends with Jane, or I must give up coming to see you."

And Rosie, who would have gone through fire and water sooner than lose the pleasure of her brother's society, pro-

mised to keep her ears and eyes open, and effect a meeting between him and Jane Warner if possible. In compliance with which, about a week afterwards he received the following epistle :

" DEAREST WILFRID,—

" Do you know the place they call the Old Dairy Farm, about a couple of miles from this on the Middlebridge Road? *She* is going there to-morrow afternoon, if fine, to get butter and eggs. She will take the child and perambulator with her. She will start about two or half-past, and be returning about four. Go down by Davis the grocer's, in a straight line to Atherton Terrace; then turn sharp to the left, and cross Caulfield Road into Middlebridge Road, and it is right before you. Hoping you may succeed; but for goodness' sake don't say a word about me.

" Ever your affectionate

" ROSIE."

This intelligence threw Sir Wilfrid into a state of the greatest excitement. Had he been obliged to parade for hours up and down the Middlebridge Road, he would have done so in order to get speech of Jane Warner. He could not imagine how he could have waited for two years for news of her. Supposing she had died in the interim, what a lifelong reproach it would have been to him! All he wanted to know regarding her was, if she was happy and at peace. Assured of this, he would be ready to follow her wishes in everything. That is what he persuaded himself.

He had been unable to make up his mind whether it would be better to meet her going to or coming from the Old Dairy Farm. If the former, and she proved amenable to his entreaties, they might have the pleasure of a long walk and talk together. But, on the other hand, if she forbade him to accompany her, he would have to beat an ignominious retreat. He resolved, therefore, to leave it to chance. Perhaps she would have passed by before his arrival. At the same time, Sir Wilfrid was at the place of meeting before the hour named for Jane leaving the cottage.

It was a beautiful spring day now, in the middle of April. The lime-trees that shaded the paths on the Middlebridge Road had put forth their tender leaves of green, the quick-

set hedges were full of shoots; above his head the birds were wheeling in their giddy courtships. Everything smelt so fresh and sweet, and looked so rural, that it was difficult to believe one was within a mile of one of the busiest suburbs of London.

Sir Wilfrid sauntered along, casting a look over his shoulder every minute, to see if the person of whom he was in search was yet in sight. At last he saw her coming. He was sure he could not be mistaken in the tall, graceful figure pushing the perambulator in front of her. A little less distance between them, and he was certain it was Jane.

He could recognise the swan-like elegance of her neck and head—could even catch the tones of her soft, rich voice as she addressed some words to the child in the perambulator. And then Sir Wilfrid, instead of rushing to meet her with an extended hand, took fright and fled—that is to say, he crossed over to the opposite side of the road, and stood with his back towards it, wrapt, apparently, in admiration of the surrounding landscape, which included the gasworks for Chelsea, and preparations for a branch line on the Metropolitan Railway.

When the time came, he was too great a coward to meet the eyes of the woman he had wronged. He feared that their righteous wrath might slay him like a flash of lightning. There he stood for fully five minutes, wondering if she had recognised him—if she were standing on the opposite pathway, stricken with anguish, unable to proceed—if she would cross over presently and dare him to speak to her, and denounce him to his face. But none of these things happened.

After having waited a considerable time without hearing or seeing anything, Sir Wilfrid ventured to look round and saw that she was a long way ahead of the spot on which he stood. There she went, toiling behind the little carriage, with her graceful head bent down and her eyes fixed upon the child. No backward glance of curiosity showed that she had even noticed the gallant Baronet's back, and Sir Wilfrid felt a slight pang of annoyance that it should be so.

What was the use of being acknowledged to be one of the handsomest men about town, and of wearing a faultless suit from Poole, if no one looked at him? But anyway, he looked at her. He gazed after the girl, and took in every

item of her dress, till she passed out of his sight ; and then he followed slowly in the same direction.

How modestly she was attired, and yet how like a gentlewoman she looked ! No one could have mistaken her for anything else. Her black walking dress of some homely material, fitted her slight figure to perfection. Her black hat had an orange-coloured wing in it, and there was something of the same hue showing above the fur around her throat.

The more Sir Wilfrid gazed at her, the more distinct became his memories of the past. The years during which they had been divided seemed to melt away. Jane Warner was his again—the woman he had loved and married and lived with ; and he was determined, whatever came of it, to speak to her. He followed her at a respectful distance as far as the Dairy Farm, and watched her disappear behind its gates. This was the most unfrequented part of the whole road. Far or near there was not a creature to be seen, except the herdsmen connected with the farm, and here Sir Wilfrid resolved to wait for her. She was long in reappearing. She seemed to have friends, as well as business, at the farm, from the length of time that they detained her. But at last she came, wheeling her perambulator swiftly along the gravelled path, and laughing gaily as she did so. No one who heard Jane Warner then would have thought she had a broken heart. A stout woman accompanied her to the gate, and stooped down to kiss the baby.

"Bleis her 'art, how she grows !" she exclaimed. "Why, it seems but yesterday she was shorted."

"Yes, and you should hear her talk, Mrs. Baines," replied Jane. "She can say almost anything, and as for mischief, she's never out of it."

"Ah, you've got a handful, no doubt, miss," said Mrs. Baines ; "but if she's an amusement to your poor dear ma, why, that's everything, ain't it ? And don't let her sit on the flowers nor cakes, miss, for they're a special present from me to Mrs. Warner."

"Indeed she shall not, and I hardly know how to thank you enough, Mrs. Baines, for thinking so kindly of my dear mother. Such a little thing pleases the poor soul. It is very good of you."

"Lor', Miss Warner, don't say another word about it ! All

the world knows what a daughter you've been to her, and it's little anyone can do to help you."

Jane seemed anxious to cut this eulogy short.

"Well, then, I must say good-bye to you. The eggs and butter are all right in the basket. And now, Nellie, my darling, you must be a good girl and sit quite still, and not crush Janie's flowers and cakes.

"*My flowers and cakes*," corrected the child.

"Listen to *that* now—the sharpness of her!" cried Mrs. Baines in admiration.

"Oh, Mrs. Baines, you'll spoil her entirely if I don't take her home! So now we're off. One, two, three and away," and suiting the action to the word, Jane bowled the perambulator along the country path. She was not out of sight of the Old Dairy Farm, when she found herself running up against the legs of a gentleman."

"I beg your pardon," she cried quickly.

The stranger did not move nor answer her, and looking up, she encountered, to her consternation, Sir Wilfrid Ewell. He was gazing at her fixedly, with a look of the utmost melancholy, and as his eyes met hers they seemed to take her breath away. She stopped short in the pathway, and bent her head over the perambulator.

"Jane," he began in a low voice, "are we never to be friends again?"

"I have always been your friend," she answered, with a trembling lip.

"But you refuse to see or speak to me. You absent yourself whenever I enter the cottage. You have no hesitation in showing that my presence is distasteful to you."

"What is the use of speaking or seeing?" she said, in a tone sharp with pain. "What good can it do? It can only make the past more bitter to remember, the present more difficult to bear."

"Then you *have* felt it, dear? you *do* feel it still? Regret is as keen with you as with myself."

"It can never be *that*, Will, for I never injured you."

"I know. Forgive me. But let me still remain your friend."

"To what end? It cannot undo the past. It cannot even ameliorate it. We are separated by your own free will. Let me go on my way for the future unmolested."

"*I cannot.* You do not know what this separation has cost me ; how bitterly I have repented it. Oh, Jane ! I am so miserable ! I have not a friend—worthy the name—to look to but yourself."

At that she raised her eyes with astonishment and stared him in the face. Pity—the loveliest virtue in the composition of woman—thrilled her through, and effaced for a moment the memory of her own wrongs.

"*Not a friend !*" she ejaculated, "with your mother and sisters, and—and—the person you call Lady Ewell ! Why, what has become, then, of all the friends for whom you deserted me ?"

"They were not deserving of the name, Jane. Has not Rosie told you of the unfortunate relations between my—I mean, between Lady Ewell and myself ? We are not living together. It is very probable we shall never live together again. I was blinded, Jane, by an insane passion for her beauty, and my Nemesis has come upon me sooner than I thought."

"It comes to most of us," she answered quietly.

"It can never come to *you*, dear. You have never done anything deserving of such a fate. If I could only show you what I feel, what I have suffered ! Oh, Jane ! *do* have some pity for me. I would accept the smallest spark from you now with gratitude."

Jane could hardly trust her voice to answer him. She had loved this man—she *did* love him still, with the utmost devotion, and she feared lest he should guess her feelings and take advantage of them. She looked at Sir Wilfrid, and was about to return a cold and indifferent reply. She glanced at Nellie, who sat with her mouth wide open at the extraordinary scene passing between "Danie and a gumpelman," and her resolution faltered.

"What is it you require of me, Will ?" she said gently.

"I want your affection. No, Jane, don't mistake me ! I know that the past is past, and can never come over again. I have bound myself legally to another woman, and I mean to keep my troth with her. But I want your friendship and advice, dear. I want to be able to come to you as in the old days for counsel in my difficulties, to ask you what I shall do, and to follow your lead as my guiding star. I want you, in fact, for *my friend*."

"Oh, Will," she said, with the tears falling down her cheeks, "you must not think of it! It can never be——"

"Have I then grown so distasteful to you that you cannot bear my presence? Is the past in which I had a share so hideous a memory that you are afraid to recall it? Am I altogether too unworthy to sit in the same room and converse as an ordinary acquaintance with you, Jane?"

"If I thought that any good could come of it!" she sighed.

"What *harm* can come of it?" he answered. "Because we were once so near and dear to one another, are we never to clasp hands in friendship more? The connection that existed between us should render such a thing as ill-feeling impossible. Jane, I have no hesitation in telling you that I am a most unhappy man. My married life has proved a bitter disappointment in every way to me. My money has brought me little pleasure, my wife less. Don't make me think all the world is untrue. Leave me my faith in one pure, guileless heart that loved me for myself alone, and was not ashamed to own it."

"When I thought that you were *mine*," she whispered through her tears.

"By the memory of those days then, be my friend. Let me be yours. You know how fond I am of my sister, and she is much attached to you. For all you have done for her, I can never sufficiently show my gratitude. And if I may not try to prove it—however poorly—my burdened conscience will have yet another load to bear. You have been good enough to give me permission to visit Rosie, but you refuse to receive me yourself. Jane, I cannot continue to come to your house on such conditions. It degrades me in my own eyes, and those of others."

"What do you wish me to do?" she repeated, raising her weary, tear-stained eyes to his face.

"Only to be yourself. Either tell me never to appear at Wolsey Cottage again, or promise me you will not run out of your own house directly I ring for admittance."

"I will not leave it again on that account. I promise you——"

"Thank you so much! And Jane, if you will try to think——" he commenced wistfully; but she stopped him.

"Please don't say any more about it. I have consented to receive you as a friend. That is enough!"

"May I not thank you for the concession?"

"No. Between friends it loses its claim to the title."

At this juncture little Nellie created a diversion in her own favour.

"Danie mustn't ty," she said, alluding to the tears which poor Jane found it so difficult to restrain.

"What a pretty child!" remarked Sir Wilfrid, for the first time observing the occupant of the perambulator.

"Who is she?"

"*Who is she?*" repeated Jane in a startled voice—"who is she? Why, she's an adopted child of mother's. We never heard the name of her parents. We found her."

"*Found her!* What an extraordinary thing to do!" said Sir Wilfrid, still examining little Nellie.

"Is it? I thought it happened every day in London. Some one put her over the garden-wall, and we kept her. We couldn't have done anything else, could we?"

"You could have sent her to the workhouse or the Foundling," said her companion.

"I Danie's child," remarked Nellie.

"Yes, my darling, and Janie would work her life out before you should go either to the workhouse or the Foundling," exclaimed Jane, with unnecessary emphasis.

"A *very* pretty child!" repeated Sir Wilfrid contemptively.

He was right. The little foundling had developed into a lovely specimen of infancy. She was now about two years old, and had just learned to talk and run. Her fair hair fell over her face and neck in a profusion of soft baby curls. Her complexion was of milk and roses, and from the midst of it gleamed two large grey eyes fringed with dark lashes, which gave her a quaint and unusual appearance. She was a delicately formed little creature, with tiny hands and feet, and looked very unlike the offspring of some drunken tramp or workhouse bird.

She was dressed, too, like a little lady. Her smiling little face peeped out of a grey velvet hood trimmed with chin-chilla, and a pelisse of the same materials kept her body warm. In fact, Jane made an idol of this child thrown so unexpectedly on her sole care, and would have denied herself

food and drink in order to procure what she considered necessary for the baby. And little Nellie repaid her devotion with all the love in her power. She was *Danie's child*, and indignant if anyone dared to dispute the truth of her assertion. She slept in *Danie's* arms, and toddled after her all day, and would take her food from no other hand. If it had not been for this small piece of humanity, Jane Warner's heart would have succumbed entirely under the load of pain it bore. But for Nellie's sake, and to do Nellie service, she had bravely borne up under the blasts of misfortune, and her reward lay in the complete thriving of her innocent charge.

"You seem to have a faculty for taking burdens on yourself, Jane," remarked Sir Wilfrid. "First, your poor mother, then my truant sister, and now this little orphan. You must have enough to do with them all."

"I did not take them; they were sent me," she answered, and she folded Nellie's wrappings closer round her, and went on her homeward journey.

They had by this time reached the streets, and the time for confidence and emotion was over. Jane breathed more freely as she trod the pavement. The walk along the country road had been a fearful trial to her.

"Jane," said Sir Wilfrid as they neared the cottage, "what do you intend to do?"

"I do not understand you."

"What plans have you made for the future?"

"None. I have my daily work to perform, and I leave the future to God."

"I have not *quite* spoiled your life, have I?" he whispered.

"It is not in the power of mortals to *spoil* the life of another, Will," she said. "I am content that mine should be as it is. You must be content with the knowledge."

"That is just what I have been longing to hear you tell me," he exclaimed in a tone of satisfaction, "that you are happy and contented. You have indeed lifted a load from my mind, Jane. I shall go home and sleep as I have not slept for weeks past."

Still selfishly thinking of himself and his own comfort—still selfishly unmindful of her and the sea of tears through which she had waded to her present state of calm. Still un-

suspicious that that calm was all assumed, and that in granting him leave to meet her as a friend, Jane Warner had only added one more to the many sacrifices of self which should shine as jewels in her spiritual crown.

When they reached the garden-gate of Wolsey Cottage, Sir Wilfrid murmured, "May I come in?" and she answered, "Not to-day," with a hurried manner that seemed almost unkind.

He felt it, but he did not remonstrate with her. He wanted to prove, if possible, on this first occasion of their reunion, how ready he was to give in to all her wishes. Still with the idea of pleasing Jane, he took a sovereign from his pocket, and held it towards the child.

"Will baby buy a dolly?" he said.

Little Nellie made a grab at the glittering coin, but Jane Warner intercepted the offered gift, and turned upon the donor with a dignity of manner that made her almost majestic.

"I will not allow her to take it," she said firmly; "and please to understand, Sir Wilfrid Ewell, that if you wish to visit at this house, you must never again make the mistake of offering any sort of present to me, or to—the child."

So saying, Miss Warner with a jerk turned the perambulator into the garden-gate and wheeled it round the side of the cottage without bestowing another glance in the direction of Sir Wilfrid. He could not understand her displeasure. He stood looking after her and twirling the sovereign about in his hand for a minute, and then with an oath he put it in his pocket again, and took his way back to the Strand.

Jane Warner was very silent and depressed that evening. She could not make up her mind whether she had acted wisely or not. And yet, since she was the only one likely to suffer from their renewed intercourse, was it not her duty to do all in her power to help and succour this man, so much more unhappy, because so much more guilty, than herself?

But the events of the afternoon had upset and excited her to such a degree that a nervous headache—a complaint to which the poor child had become sadly subject of late years—was the result, and she was hardly able to sit up during she evening. Mrs. Warner and Miss Prosser decided that she had walked too far, and next time she went to the Dairy Farm she must take the omnibus.

But guilty Rosie guessed the secret of her friend's headache, and augured the happiest results from her evident distress. And when she crept to bed and saw Jane lying asleep with the tears still trembling on her eyelashes, she was quite sure she was not mistaken, and looked forward with delight to the day when these two, so dear to her—Wilfrid and Jane—should be as friendly together as they were before, and they should all three dwell in an Arcadian state of simplicity, conjured up by her own hopeful spirit.

Ah! Rosie little knew that the deepest love is sometimes the most fatal barrier that can be raised between two human hearts.



CHAPTER XXXI.

CHLORAL.

THE circumstances which had led to Lady Ewell returning to the protection of her mother, Lady Otto St. Blase, were as follow.

The ladies, contrary to the wishes of Sir Wilfrid, had remained together in Paris till after the new year. But Lady Otto had no control over her married daughter, and Lady Ewell did not permit her husband to have any control over her either. She had cherished a hope that Captain Dorsay would join them at the new year. He had passed the day in Paris with them on several occasions in years gone by, and never failed to present himself with a gorgeous offering of bonbons and flowers for her acceptance. But this year he was deaf alike to hints, invitations, and entreaties, and when the anniversary had passed without bringing him, Lena was as anxious to go home again as she had been before to stay.

Lady Otto was engaged to spend some weeks with her father-in-law, the Duke of Martyrdom, at Castle Blase, and she invited her daughter to accompany her. But Lena peremptorily refused. She knew from Sir Wilfrid's letters that he was in the constant company of Jack Dorsay, and concluded that they would return to Lambscote together. So she sent an authoritative letter to her husband, telling him the date of her return home, and ordering him to have everything ready for her reception.

Sir Wilfrid was not in a submissive humour when this letter arrived. He had sent Lena several tender epistles, begging her to return and spend Christmas-tide with him, and they had been met with a contemptuous silence, or with reproaches for his selfishness and want of consideration. So that he did not feel particularly eager to rush down into the country to obey her ladyship's commands. He thought it was *her* turn now to experience the mortification of a little wholesome neglect. He had just furnished his chambers and got a nice

little *coterie* of friends around him. He was, moreover pledged to spend a week in Yorkshire with a rich squire, who possessed one of the finest seats in the three Ridings. So, aided and abetted by Jack Dorsay, who entreated him to be firm, and show her ladyship which was master, Sir Wilfrid wrote directions to the housekeeper at Lambcote to have everything in readiness for the arrival of her mistress at a certain date, and went off with his friends into Yorkshire.

When Lena reached the Hall, much fatigued and out of temper from her journey, and expecting to be met by an adoring husband, not to say an adoring friend, both eager to do her bidding, she found instead an empty house, and a few lines from Wilfrid to say he had gone into the country with Captain Dorsay and would not be back for a week.

Lady Ewell's rage knew no bounds. Sir Wilfrid's desertion was nothing to her, compared to that of Jack Dorsay, but that *both* should prove defaulters at the same time was too much for her to bear.

She refused to stay at the Hall by herself, even for a week. She considered that she had been insulted, and her husband should know that she did so. She could not return again the same day, as the distance was too great. But she only slept one night at Lambcote, and set off with her maid the following morning for Castle Blase, to pour her troubles into the breasts of her mother and grandfather. But Lady Ewell did not find her relatives as sympathetic as she had hoped for. The Duke wagged his wicked old head and said :

"Pooh! pooh! pooh! Let the poor boy have a run at grass if he has a mind to. Men can't be tied for ever to their wives' apron-strings, and the best way to get on in married life is to see as little as possible of one another. That was always my plan with the late Duchess. I made a point of never being at home more than two months in the year, and what was the consequence? We never had a disagreement to the last day of her life. Take my advice, child, go home, and don't make a fool of yourself."

But this was the last advice Lena intended to take.

"It's all very fine for grandpapa to talk," she said, shrugging her shoulders at her mother. "Everyone knows what his life with grandmamma was. Why, you have told me yourself, that if she had lived another month she would have

had the old rascal up in court with about twenty ballet girls."

"Hush, Lena! pray be more careful," replied Lady Otto, glancing round fearfully to see if they were overheard. "It is true the citation was served, but the poor dear Duchess's death put an end to it all, and it is not for *us* to revive it. And the Duke is quite right, my dear. It is too absurd, your leaving home for such a trivial reason. Why didn't you send for me to keep you company? I would have put off my own visit in order to accommodate you."

"You're very good, mamma," said Lady Ewell, with a slight yawn; "but I preferred coming here. The fact is, I'm sick of Lambscote in the winter. It's too intensely dull. No one but a barbarian would dream of living there at this time of the year, and if Sir Wilfrid insists upon returning, I shall take some rooms for myself in London."

At this proposition Lady Otto looked genuinely shocked.

"Lena, you could not *think* of such a thing! It would be monstrous—unheard of! You would set the whole of Society talking about you."

"Well then, I shall come and stay with you in Onslow Gardens. No one can talk about me if I am under the protection of my mother."

"I don't know that. They may say very unkind things about your temper, and the impossibility of living in peace with you. They used to talk of that before your marriage, you may remember. At any rate, you may be sure they will say the very worst they can."

"Let them say it then. I don't care. You and I are surely strong enough to hold our own against idle gossip. My life is not to be marred, I suppose, for the sake of a little scandal."

"It is absurd to talk of your life being *marred*, Lena. One would think your husband had run away from you."

"I am going to run away from *him*, so it comes to the same thing."

"I do not believe you. You can never be so foolish."

"Please don't say any more about it then, mamma, for I have quite made up my mind."

"To live apart from Sir Wilfrid?"

"Yes."

"Lena, I will not sanction it! You must not come to me, for I will not receive you."

"Then I shall take rooms—as I said before—for myself, and if I set the tongues of Society wagging, it will be *your* fault."

Lady Otto looked her daughter earnestly in the face.

"What!" she exclaimed, "what *can* be the reason of this obstinate persistence on your part?"

"*What is the reason?*" repeated Lady Ewell passionately. "The reason is that I *hate* him and his house, and everything connected with what I am or have been. *You* made me take this man, mother. *You* knew that I despised him from the day—years ago—that he came crawling to my feet with his pretty face and his sycophantic adoring manner. I spurned him then, and you laughed at the act and cried, '*Well done!*' And yet, when he came into this miserable money you made me draw him on, and profess to like him, and answer '*Yes,*' when I ought to have said a thousand times '*No.*' You knew that I loved another man with all my heart and soul, and that I was selling myself to Sir Wilfrid Ewell, and yet you stood by and sanctioned the proceeding! And now, if it should bring any inconvenience on yourself, or any blot upon the family name, you have but one person to thank for it. Don't talk to me about '*reasons*' again."

"Lena, you are exceedingly ungrateful and exceedingly unjust! If by the '*other man*' you mean that *vaurien* Captain Dorsay, you know perfectly well that he never would have married you under any circumstances."

"That was *my* business, and not yours," returned Lady Ewell sullenly.

"I say that it *was* my business, decidedly. His attentions were endangering your good name, and I consider your keeping up his acquaintance now most ill-advised."

"Oh, he is no longer a friend of *mine*," retorted Lena with a toss of her head; "Captain Dorsay is now the intimate friend and boon companion of Sir Wilfrid Ewell."

"So much the better for you," said her mother; "and since you have so *complaisant* a husband, I cannot see why you should want to separate from him and create a scandal."

"I do not intend to create a scandal. I am an only child, and no one can find fault with my caring too much for my mother. So I shall inform Sir Wilfrid that, for the coming

season at all events, he can occupy his chambers, and I shall take up my abode with you."

"You do not even ask if it will be convenient for me to receive you!"

"Don't be afraid, mamma. I will engage you shall be no loser by the transaction. I shall have my carriage, of course, and my servants; and there will be no need for you to keep up yours as well. And I shall see that Sir Wilfrid pays you a handsome sun to cover the rest."

Lady Otto, who was intensely worldly, and rather avaricious, finding that no arguments or entreaties had any effect with her daughter, proceeded to look at the matter from another point of view, and to calculate how much gain was to be made out of the transaction.

Meanwhile Lena played her tactics well. She did not startle Sir Wilfrid all at once with so extravagant a proposition as that they should no longer be husband and wife, but it came round to that by degrees. First of all she was seriously offended and hurt by his want of attention to her, and desired he would not cut short his visit to Yorkshire on her account, as she was staying with her dear old grandfather, who was only *too* delighted to have her, and the Castle was full. Then her health failed. She had had a series of attacks of palpitation, and the doctors thought her case was one requiring the utmost care, under which circumstances, Lady Ewell said, she could not think of leaving her dear mother. She might die at any moment, and as she was liable to be left *alone* at Lambscote Hall, the medical men strictly forbade her returning there for the present.

Sir Wilfrid was at first frightened by these letters. He wanted to rush to his divinity, to obtain her pardon for all his shortcomings. He asked to be allowed to wait upon her night and day—to show her his devotion by his solicitude and attention—to be her nurse, her support, her everything.

But Lena received these rhapsodies very coldly. There was always something to prevent her husband following her to Castle Blase. The house was full even to the garrets—dear grandpapa was threatened with an attack of gout—or she herself was ill, and strictly forbidden to see anyone but mamma. And after awhile he found out she had been lying to him—that she had never been ill at all; and then all his

interest ceased, and he reproached her bitterly instead for the deception.

This was the opening Lena desired. His letters, so she averred, proved how little he cared for her, so she had made up her mind to go to town with her mother and pass the season in Onslow Gardens.

Sir Wilfrid was too proud to object. He told her to go where she pleased, and to accord him the same liberty. He saw plainly now, aided by Captain Dorsay's explanations, how untrue Lena was, and although his pride was hurt by her avoidance of him, he soon ceased to suffer more poignantly.

She took up her residence with Lady Otto, making the extreme delicacy of her health the excuse for so unusual a proceeding, and he went back to his bachelor chambers and plunged into dissipations such as he had never experienced in his life before. For though Wilfrid Ewell had knocked about town since he was a boy, he was not a fast man, nor had he been in the habit of associating with fast men. His slender purse had happily preserved him from much evil, and his affection for Jane Warner had kept him pure. But his heart was too heavy now not to require some distraction, and he took to wine-parties and card-parties, and to the *coulisses* of the opera house, almost as kindly as Jack Dorsay himself. His wife, in her way, was taking to dissipation also.

Lady Otto, who had entertained some strong suspicions respecting her daughter's anxiety to take up her abode in Onslow Gardens, watched her very narrowly when she had got her there. She was a worldly, irreligious woman, but she was not going to let Lena disgrace herself and her family for lack of a little care. She felt certain that her object in living in London was to have the daily chance of meeting Captain Dorsay, and she felt equally determined that she should not do so—at least, without a witness. She need not have been afraid. Jack Dorsay had another project in view at that moment, and had it not been the case, no power on earth would have brought him back again to Lady Ewell's feet.

But Lena was not yet aware of it. Each day her mother saw her cheek flush feverishly as their carriage turned into the Park, and her eyes rove incessantly from one side of the

Row to the other, for fear of losing sight of the only person she was there to see.

Twice they met him, indeed, but each time accompanied by Sir Wilfrid Ewell, when both men raised their hats to the ladies, and nothing more. Lady Otto suspected that her daughter wrote to Captain Dorsay, but she was never able to establish the fact. Lady Ewell had her own maid to carry and receive her letters, and her mother felt she had no right to interfere. But she guessed it, from the anxiety with which Lena awaited the postman's knock—from the look of sickening disappointment that crept over her face, as she examined the envelopes presented to her. The mother and daughter had lost all pleasure in each other's society. The one was a prisoner—the other a gaoler, and Lena felt as if she had been more free (as indeed she was) at Lambscote. But her husband never wrote to her now, nor attempted to see her, and the only evidence she had of his existence was when she received the allowance which was regularly forwarded to her.

At last the woman grew really sick with longing and disappointment, and the conviction that she had made a hopeless tangle of a life which might otherwise have been tolerably easy. Lady Otto heard her pacing up and down her room at night—not despairingly, but angrily—as if she cursed her fate, and everything connected with it, for having brought her to so dismal a pass. Yet in the morning she would appear with heavy-lidded sleepy eyes, and in answer to all interrogations would declare she had never rested better in her life.

Lady Otto could not understand it. But before long she understood it too well. One morning, when she had waited for her breakfast beyond the usual hour, she sent for Lady Ewell's maid, and desired to know if her mistress was getting up.

"I don't know, my lady," replied the servant. "I took up her ladyship's hot water at the usual time, and I have orders to wait after that until her ladyship rings the bell for me. And her ladyship hasn't rung yet, my lady."

"She must have fallen asleep again," said Lady Otto. "Go upstairs and tell her, with my love, that it is past twelve o'clock. Perhaps she will have her breakfast served in her own room."

The woman went upon her errand, but returned in double quick time, with a look of consternation.

"Oh! if you please, my lady, will you come to her ladyship? I can't wake her, my lady, do what I will; and she looks for all the world as if she was dead, my lady."

Lady Otto turned very pale. She attached more importance to Lena's attacks of palpitation than the doctors did, and her first impression was that her daughter had been suddenly launched upon the unseen world. She ran upstairs as quickly as she could, and reached Lena's bedroom. The first view of her was startling enough. Lady Ewell was lying over the side of the bed—ghastly white—with her eyes fixed and her mouth open. But she was not dead, for she breathed with a harsh, snoring sound.

"What is this?" exclaimed Lady Otto, as she raised her daughter's head. "What has she taken?"

"Oh dear, my lady!" cried the whimpering maid, "I do hope as it's nothing as will harm her ladyship. But her ladyship she *will* take drops to make herself sleep, my lady, and——"

"Go for a doctor!" exclaimed Lady Otto authoritatively. "Send one of the men for Dr. Marshall, and tell him to come here at once."

In a few minutes, during which she had tried in vain to restore Lady Ewell to consciousness, the doctor stood by the bedside.

He examined the patient's eyeballs, and said briefly:

"Hydrate of chloral!—an overdose!"

"Oh, doctor! will it kill her?"

"Not this time; but Lady Ewell had better be careful how she plays such tricks with herself. I have cautioned her against opiates of all kinds. The palpitations she suffers from, though not dangerous in themselves, indicate a very weak heart, and an indiscretion of this sort might prove fatal to her. Let her sleep it off now, Lady Otto. She will probably not wake for some hours yet. But when she does, you must give her a good talking to, or very serious consequences may ensue."

Lena was awake by dinner-time, and apparently in her usual spirits; but her mother did not mention the subject to her till the following morning. And when she did, she found to her consternation that Lady Ewell was obstinately

opposed to believing that any harm could accrue to her from the use of chloral.

Dr. Marshall was a fool, she said, and didn't know what he was talking about. All women used chloral if they couldn't sleep. As for herself, she thought it the most delightful medicine in the world. As soon as ever she drank it, she went off into a heavenly dream of peace and happiness, and she wouldn't give up the use of it for anything.

"But, Lena, my dear child," said Lady Otto, trembling, "all women have not so weak a heart as yours, remember. Dr. Marshall says it is most dangerous for you to take chloral with those palpitations, and that at any moment a drop too much might prove fatal.

"What's the odds?" said Lady Ewell, with a harsh laugh. "No one would be the worse for my death that I can see. And as for myself, the sooner I go the better."

"Oh, Lena! you *cannot* be in earnest," cried her mother, amazed at her foolhardiness, for, like all worldly women, she had an intense horror of death herself. "You cannot wish to give up your life at seven-and-twenty, and when you don't know where you're going, either."

"There can't be a worse hell than I have endured whilst here," said Lena. "Oh, mother! if you knew *what* I suffer—what I *have* suffered—your only surprise would be that I do not end it at once and for ever."

"But, my dear girl, what *have* you to make you unhappy? I am sure you have means sufficient to indulge your slightest fancy, and plenty of friends. And you *might* have a most devoted husband into the bargain, if you were not so determined to keep him at a distance, and refuse the benefits which his protection would afford you."

Lena made no answer. Her soft mood had already passed, and anything like an allusion to sentiment only made her sneer. She pushed her mother to one side, and ended the argument.

"All the doctors in London will not persuade me to give up my chloral," she said, as she left the room.

From that day a continual warfare (though an amicable one) waged between Lady Otto and her daughter, and it was doubtful for a long time which side would win. It was the mother's aim—by artifice, by bribery, or by force of arms—to prevent Lena being supplied with the soporific that might

prove her death. And Lena—perfectly aware of the tricks that were being carried on behind her back—made it the business of her life to procure it. It was in vain that poor Lady Otto enlisted the doctor and chemist on her side—that she bribed the maid to substitute some other drug for the chloral—that she watched her daughter like a lynx, and used every precaution possible to neutralize the effects of the medicine she secretly procured and swallowed. Lena, in some marvellous manner, evaded all her *espionage*, and did exactly as she chose. The habit had grown so strong with her that she found it impossible to shake it off. She was like the drunkard, who, once thoroughly infected with his fatal madness, could not be induced to stop, even if the flames of hell were opened before him. But she did not let the world guess her weakness. She pretended to her mother that she saw the danger of such a custom, and had completely given it up. And as she was careful never to be overtaken in like measure again, it seemed probable that her assertion was true.

And so the season rolled on its course; and whilst Sir Wilfrid was spending a great deal of his time in the cause of friendship in Jane Warner's cottage, Lady Ewell was gazing anxiously from her drawing-room windows for the appearance of a form that never knocked for admittance at the front-door in Onslow Gardens.

CHAPTER XXXII.

FRIENDS.

IF Sir Wilfrid Ewell imagined for a moment that Jane Warner, in giving her reluctant consent to his visiting Wolsey Cottage, intended that they should meet on anything approaching their former terms of intimacy, he was very much mistaken. She kept her word with him. She no longer forced herself to leave the house directly Rosie intimated that her brother was coming to see them. But, on the other hand, she never put aside any duty or engagement in order to enjoy his company. And he never saw her by herself. An ordinary shake of the hand and a quiet smile, given in the midst of the family circle, were all the recognition he could obtain from the girl he had once called his wife.

He appeared in Chelsea much oftener than he had done before, in the feverish hope of finding Jane alone ; but it never happened so. If Rosie was from home, she had the old mother to keep her company, and if both were absent, she would summon the servant to look after the child in her presence.

Sir Wilfrid was in despair. He was afraid that Jane's persistent avoidance of him was due to another motive than the mere wish to refuse his confidence. He was jealous of Mr. Cobble. He knew he had no right to be jealous of anybody ; but if we only did what we knew to be right, this would be a happy world.

And there is no doubt that Cobble's influence hovered about the little cottage like a protecting angel. It was to be seen everywhere. On the supper-table—in the window—on the bookshelf—Mr. Cobble's fruit, flowers and literature unblushingly displayed themselves. The poor young man had been in love with Jane Warner for years, and began to think it was time to be settled. So he persecuted her with notes, and presents, and serenades. He waylaid her in the passage, the garden, and the street. He bribed Caroline, and petted Nellie, and was like a son to Mrs. Warner. But all in vain.

Jane sat amongst his floral offerings like a marble goddess, and made no sign, unless it was one of impatience at a folly with which she could not sympathise.

Anyone with sense could have seen as much. But Wilfrid Ewell was beginning to lose his senses again as far as Jane Warner was concerned. He grew jealous of Cobble's attentions, and Rosie, who little dreamt what reason her brother had to be jealous of Jane's preference for another man, took the utmost delight in teasing him, and leading him on to make a greater fool of himself. She thought that the deep interest he took in Jane's matrimonial affairs augured well for the renewal of the friendship that was not re-cementing as rapidly as she would have liked to see it do.

On one occasion Sir Wilfrid appeared at the cottage with a basket of hot-house roses. He was always longing to do something for the Warners, but after Jane's caution he had not dared to offer her anything personally. So he spent his money ostensibly on his sister Rosie, but his gifts, as on the present occasion, generally consisted of something that would benefit the whole household.

He had been much struck by these roses when passing through Covent Garden Market, for it was still early in the year, and they were particularly fine ones. He had paid an absurd price to secure the basket, and bore them off to Chelsea in the utmost good-humour with himself. He remembered Jane's intense love of roses, and thought he should surely obtain a smile of gratitude from her for the pleasure they would afford.

It was evening, and he found the two girls sitting close together, with their heads bent over a letter. Jane was smiling and Rosie giggling. It was evident the epistle before them was no ordinary one. And on the table was another basket of roses, very similar to that which Sir Wilfrid carried in his hand.

"Here is Wilfrid!" exclaimed Rosie joyfully, as her brother entered the room. "Why, what is this? You don't mean to say you have brought us roses, too? We shall be quite over-stocked with them. Fancy! what fashionable ladies we are, Jane, being over-stocked with roses in the month of April! We shall have peaches and nectarines for dessert next!"

"And from whom, pray, did the others come?" demanded

Sir Wilfrid, with unconcealed jealousy, as he placed his basket also on the table.

"Who *should* they come from but poor dear Cobble? Haven't I told you that he spends every halfpenny he can spare on our mutual friend here? She'll have to take pity on him at last, to prevent his starving himself to death for her sake. I believe the infatuated young man goes without his dinner in order to send her flowers. Jane, in smelling these roses you are sniffing up his very life!"

"How can you be so silly, Rosie?" said Jane quietly.

Sir Wilfrid glanced at her as she sat under the lamplight stitching at some needlework. She did not blush at his sister's *badinage*, but neither did she smile, and his jealousy made him suspect that she had some interest in the subject under discussion.

"Perhaps, as Mr. Cobble keeps you so well supplied," he said, "I had better take my humble offering back again. I know more than one person who would not despise it."

"Indeed, you will do no such thing!" cried Rosie; "the idea of it! You mean, stingy creature! Mr. Cobble does not send his flowers to *me*. They are all for Jane, as he takes good care to let her know. We were reading his letter when you came in. It is the seventeenth proposal he has sent her this year! I will go on with it. Let me see—where was I?"

But Jane stretched out her hand to secure the paper.

"No, Rosie," she said; "please don't read any more. I let you see it because you have read the others, but it would not be fair to make it public."

"But Wilfrid is not a stranger. He won't tell any one," pleaded Rosie.

"All the same, I would rather you gave it to me."

"*Miss Warner*," interposed Sir Wilfrid, with a savage emphasis on the appellation, "may have some idea of accepting this offer, Rosie, in which case it would naturally be sacred to her."

"*Miss Warner*," replied Jane, in the same tone of voice, but raising her calm eyes to his, "knows of no reason, Sir Wilfrid, why she should *not* do exactly as she chooses in the matter."

And the next minute she rose from her seat, and, without any flurry or apparent annoyance, quietly left the room with Mr. Cobble's letter in her hand.

Sir Wilfrid hummed a tune and shuffled about, to show that he was perfectly at his ease, whilst Rosie looked after her anxiously.

"I wish you hadn't said that, Wilfrid. You have turned an innocent little joke into a serious matter. Jane never minds *my* laughing with her about Mr. Cobble—I dare say we should laugh just the same if she were married to him to-morrow; but *your* ridiculing him is quite a different thing."

"Do you think she *will* marry him, then?" asked her brother, with assumed indifference, as he walked about the room.

"I see no reason why she should not. There is never any accounting for marriages, you know. And he possesses the one thing needful. He is very fond of her."

"And Jane—is she very fond of him?"

"I don't think so. I don't think she cares for anybody in *that* way. But I suppose she will marry some day, as most women do."

"When she does—if ever she does—I hope it will be some one better than that idiot Cobble," replied Sir Wilfrid wrathfully.

"What is the matter with you, Wilfrid? Surely, you are not well. Now I come to look at you, dear, you are very thin to what you were, and your eyes are bloodshot. Are you worried about anything?"

At the affectionate interest which his sister's voice betrayed, Sir Wilfrid sat down at the table and buried his face in his hands.

"*Worried!*" he said, in a broken voice. "How can I be anything else—living in this wretched manner, apart from my wife, and with no one but men to turn to in any trouble or distress?"

"You always have Jane and me, dear," said his sister softly.

"I don't know that coming here makes me any better; in fact, I think it does me harm. You see how Jane treats me; she has lost all her former sense of friendship. And well she may, considering the sort of life I lead."

"What sort of life do you lead, Wilfrid?"

"Such as I could not describe to you, Rosie. That is sufficient to tell you it is no good. A life that turns night into day, and is kept up on excitement and brandy. What else

can you expect of a man in my circumstances? I am like a boat that has lost its rudder. If it were not for Dorsay and one or two other friends, I think I should go mad."

At that name Rosie changed colour. She had long ago lost all sentimental feeling for Captain Dorsay, but she could not hear him mentioned without some sort of emotion.

"Who did you say?" she asked her brother presently.

"Dorsay. Don't you remember Jack Dorsay, who used to be such a friend of Lena's—a dark, good-looking fellow? He was at Lambcote part of the time you were there."

"Yes; I remember him," said Rosie.

"He is my greatest chum now; I quite mistook his character at first. I was jealous of him, and fancied he liked Lena too well. But I have found since that he is not such a fool as I am. He saw through her from the beginning, and despised her heartily. He has quite dropped her acquaintance now, and never goes near Onslow Gardens."

"That is as well for you," replied his sister quietly.

"Of course it is. After the way she has treated me, he couldn't be friends with both of us at the same time."

"Are you sure he is a *good* friend to you, dear Wilfrid? You never *used* to gamble, and go to races, and drink, as by your own account I gather you do now."

"How could I live without some distraction, Rosie? You don't know, child—it is impossible you should ever know—the unnecessary misery I have heaped up for myself. Without amusement, my thoughts alone would drive me mad. It is true I have been going a little fast lately; the men of Dorsay's set are used to high play, and are formidable opponents. I was very lucky at first, but I have been deucedly unfortunate lately. I lost a thousand pounds last night at cards. I am afraid I must have been a little queer, for I never played so badly in my life."

"*A thousand pounds!*" exclaimed Rosie, with open eyes. "Oh, Wilfrid, it is a fortune!"

She, who had been working late and early for two years past to make the humble pittance necessary to provide her with board and lodging, might well open her eyes at hearing of a thousand pounds lost over idle play. How many women in England have to suffer penury and discomfort in their unhappy homes for the sake of those vile pieces of card! How soon will the Law, which busies itself over so many trifles it

might justly leave alone, make it penal for men to rob women and children of their maintenance for the sake of their own selfish gratification?

"Don't make a fuss about it," said Wilfrid, with the impatience of a man who knows he has done wrong. "It's no use crying over spilt milk; and, luckily, I shall not miss it. I don't care for my money as I used to do, Rosie. If I'm to live all my life away from Lena, it won't take much to keep my body and soul together."

"But Lena is not *everything*," remonstrated his sister. "Have you forgotten Lambscote? Surely, you are not going to let Lambscote go to rack and ruin because a selfish woman, who never cared for you, chooses to live with her mother!"

"Lambscote may go to the d—l!" he exclaimed, in a fury. "I have already spoken to Parfitt about letting it. Do you suppose I am going to be mewed up in that hole by myself from one year's end to the other?"

Then Rosie saw there was something really wrong. She left her seat, and came round to her brother's side.

"Is that Captain Dorsay's advice to you?" she asked gently.

"No. What makes you think so?"

"Because I do not believe that a man who entices you to drink, and to bet, and to gamble, *can* be a true and honest friend, Wilfrid. Because I have never heard you speak in so reckless and selfish a manner before—and—and—because," continued Rosie in a breaking voice, "it makes me *miserable*!"

"It is no use crying about it, little sister," he said. "The fates are against me; I don't succeed in anything. The sooner it is all over, the better."

"I don't know what to say to you," sobbed Rosie. "I wish Jane was here. Jane could tell you much better what is right to do than I can."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake don't let us have any of Jane's lectures!" he cried, with the impatience of pain.

But Rosie did not fail to repeat to her friend all that had passed between her brother and herself, and for some days afterwards Jane's pride struggled against her feelings, as she tried to decide whether she could really bring herself to speak to Sir Wilfrid on the subject.

The following Sunday he strolled in, when the whole of the family was assembled on the lawn at the back of the house. His sister and Miss Prosser had their bonnets on, in readiness to start for afternoon church, and Rosie laughingly asked her brother to accompany them. But he grumbled out a refusal, and threw himself in a despondent attitude on the grass instead. Little Nellie, who had grown familiar with the sight of him, toddled up to his side, and commenced to decorate him with daisies. Jane sat on a bench near at hand, and Mrs. Warner, seeing the party occupied, trotted off in the direction of the cottage.

"Mother," called out Jane, "where are you going? I want you here. Please to come back, and remain with me."

"Are you afraid to trust yourself alone with me for half an hour, Jane?" asked Wilfrid, looking up at her.

"My mother is not safe by herself. She will do some mischief if I do not look after her," replied Jane, rising.

"Why can't the servant see after her? You used to consider Sarah sufficient for that purpose in the old days."

But Jane, without taking any notice of his remark, brought Mrs. Warner back from the house, and seated her on the bench beside her.

"I want you to see, mother, that Nellie doesn't pick the flowers when she toddles out of sight."

"Dear little Nellie, *do* go and toddle out of sight!" exclaimed Sir Wilfrid significantly.

"Does she annoy you?" inquired Jane; "if so, I will take her away."

"No, no! I like to play with her. I think she is the prettiest little lass I've ever seen. It has been a real trouble to me, having no children."

"Have you none?"

"Have you so little interest left in me as not to know?"

Jane lowered her eyes.

"Rosie has never mentioned it," she said.

"No, I have not got a child," he resumed presently, with a sigh. "It has been a great disappointment. I would give half my fortune for one. It would have made things different, I think. A child is such a sacred link between a husband and wife."

"Yes," replied Jane Warner, biting her lips.

"If we had had an heir to Lambcote, Lady Ewell would have felt herself more bound to remain there."

"She is bound, in any case—you are both bound. I don't think there is any condition made about an heir in the marriage service."

"You are right. But where there is money, you see, one naturally hopes for such things. But I am born to be unlucky. I wish I had just such another as Nellie. I could worship a little child like that, if it were my own."

Again Jane could find nothing to say in answer to him.

"Will you sell her to me, Jane?" he asked, smiling.

She shook her head.

"I don't see how that would mend matters, Sir Wilfrid; and I think the best thing you can do is to be patient and wait. I do not suppose that your present relations with—Lady Ewell can last for ever. You should make it your business to see that they do not last. She may be the one in the wrong. I do not question that. But I am sure that it is *your* duty to point out what is right to her, and, if possible, to force her to do it."

"How would you advise me to act?" he said seriously.

"I advise you to seek a reconciliation with Lady Ewell, and to take her back to Lambcote, and make her as happy and contented there as it lies in your power to do."

"You counsel me to do this?" he asked, in a tone of wonder.

"I do, indeed! I have heard, perhaps, more than you think for, and I have watched you closely for myself. I see that your present life, if continued in, will prove your ruin. You were not made for dissipation and debauchery, Will; it is as antagonistic to your nature as it is derogatory to your manhood, and therefore I beg of you to go back to Lady Ewell. She cannot be such a monster as to spurn you from her, when you have done her no wrong. Perhaps she is labouring under some mistake that an explanation will set right again. The separated lives you lead at present are unnatural for both of you. Go back to her, and to Lambcote, and I am certain you will be the happier for it."

"And give up—you?" he murmured.

"You gave me up three years ago," she said.

They had been talking together so earnestly that they had failed to notice what went on around them. In her anxiety

to change the subject Jane now looked up. Mrs. Warner was quietly slumbering on the bench beside her with her head upon her breast. Little Nellie was nowhere to be seen.

"Miss Baby has taken French leave," said Jane, as she rose from her seat. "I must go and look after the little monkey, or she will have stripped the heads off all my flowers before I catch her."

She ran gaily round the bushes and by the lily-bed—now glorious in green and white—calling the little one by name as she went, but Nellie was nowhere in sight.

"She must be with Caroline," she said, as she repassed Sir Wilfrid (still lolling on the grass) on her way to the house.

The passage in Wolsey Cottage was straight, and when both doors were open (as they were now) one could see from the back-garden into the the front. Sir Wilfrid watched Jane Warner speak to the servant from the head of the kitchen-stairs, and then run hurriedly to the front-gate. Guessing that something was wrong, he rose and followed her.

Jane ran down the path, stared about her wildly for a moment, and then with a scream of terror rushed out into the road.

She had descried little Nellie, in her white frock and fluttering blue ribbons, toddling across the thoroughfare, in the very midst of all the London traffic.

She had already started to follow her, when Sir Wilfrid grasped her arm and pushed her back upon the pavement.

"Stay there!" he exclaimed authoritatively, "and I will bring the child to you."



CHAPTER XXXIII.

NELLIE.

He dashed into the middle of the road. Cabs and omnibuses were plying their trade as vigorously as on week days, and the infant was in imminent danger of being run over. Just as Sir Wilfrid reached her side, she was innocently crossing in front of a hansom. He stretched out his arm, and seized her by the frock ; the driver pulled his horse back upon its haunches, but not before it had knocked Sir Wilfrid down, and struck him with one of its fore feet upon the thigh.

But Nellie was safe. He rose with some difficulty, and telling the driver to follow him, crossed the road again, and placed the child, unhurt, in Jane Warner's arms. She disappeared into the house with it, and Sir Wilfrid turned to reward the hansom driver for his promptitude.

"Close shave, sir, wasn't it?" said cabby, as he received a handsome gratuity : "thought it was all over with the babby myself. Thank you, sir, kindly, and I hope you're not much hurt, though I'm afraid my horse gave you an ugly knock upon the shoulder."

"It's my thigh," said Sir Wilfrid, screwing up his face with pain ; "but I dare say it won't be more than a bruise. Good-day, cabby," and he turned to re-enter the house.

He looked a comical object as he did so. His hair and clothes were covered with dust ; the lappel and skirt of his coat had been torn, and his face was contorted with the pain in his thigh. He had been completely rolled over by the blow he had received, and could not help thinking he had earned a little gratitude for the risk he had run. But as he entered the passage of Wolsey Cottage, his thoughts were entirely diverted from his own suffering.

The parlour-door was open, and he could hear Jane sobbing violently inside of it. Jane, who was usually so calm—so completely mistress of herself—what could have happened, now that the child was safe, to betray her into so common a weakness as hysterics? He hastened forward with the idea

of giving her comfort, but the sight he encountered and the words he heard arrested his steps upon the very threshold.

Jane Warner was sitting in a chair rocking the child to and fro, whilst her tears fell unrestrainedly upon its flaxen curls. She appeared to have entirely lost her self-possession, and to be unmindful of who saw or listened to her.

"Oh, my darling! my darling!" she wailed; "what should I have done if I had lost you? Oh, my own child! my own baby! The only thing he left me—the only consolation I have in this world! What would your poor mother have done had you been taken away?"

As she cried, and sobbed, and strained the little child to her bosom, no one could have mistaken the relationship between them. There was all the "*mother*," in Jane's eyes and voice. The hungry jealous look of the creature over the thing it has created, the sacred right of maternity, the absorbing pride of possession, were all present in full force, and one must have been blind indeed not to recognise them.

Sir Wilfrid stood on the threshold petrified with astonishment. It had never occurred to him that Nellie could be Jane's child. He had accepted the fable circulated in the household concerning her with perfect faith. But a light broke on him now, and the thoughts that followed it made him tremble. Yet he would not stay to ask a single question. Jane was evidently not herself. Fear had upset her usual equanimity, and her honour was at stake. The first thing he did, therefore, was to close the door, that her ravings might not be overheard. The next, to try and recall her to herself. For this purpose he went up and touched her on the shoulder.

"Jane!" he said gently, "remember where you are. Do try and compose yourself. Caroline will hear what you are saying, in the kitchen."

She seized his hand, and clung to it convulsively.

"Oh, Wilfrid! oh, husband! You are sure that she is safe?"

"I am quite sure of it, dear. Look at her! She has not even a scratch! I think the blue ribbons are the only things that have been damaged," he answered, forgetting his own bruises.

"What should I have done if I had lost her?"

"You have not lost her. She is in your arms, safe and

well. Try and calm yourself. You are frightening the poor baby.'

"Am I frightening you, my own darling?" cried Jane suddenly to the child.

"Nellie so tired, Danie. Nellie want to go seep," said the little one plaintively.

Sir Wilfrid seized the opportunity.

"Yes, Jane," he said, "she wants to go to sleep. Take her upstairs, and lie down together. It will do you both good." And he stooped down and kissed Jane on the forehead as he spoke.

It was the first kiss he had attempted to give her since they had parted, and it seemed to thrill through her frame and rouse her to a sense of her position. She shivered under it, and her blue-veined eyelids were lowered solemnly.

"Yes," she said, "it will be best to do so as you say. I will take her upstairs to sleep."

She rose slowly and walked, staggering, to the door.

"Let me carry the child for you," said Sir Wilfrid.

"No!—no!" she answered, straining Nellie tighter to her breast, as if she feared that he might take her from her. "I am quite strong enough for that."

At the door she turned towards him with sickly smile.

"I hope—I hope," she whispered, "that I have not made a great fool of myself."

"Indeed, you have neither done nor said anything but what, under the circumstances, was perfectly natural and right."

"I have not thanked you yet, though, for saving her from the hoofs of that terrible horse. Ah!"—with a shudder—"shall I ever forget it?"

"You owe me no thanks, Jane!" he said, as he looked her in the face. And then, without asking her leave, he placed his arm under her and supported her upstairs to the door of her bedroom, where he left her with a bow that might have graced his parting with a stranger.

After that he returned to the parlour and felt, as he lay down upon the sofa, as if he should faint from the pain he was enduring. Luckily for Sir Wilfrid, everyone in Wolsey Cottage was not so indifferent to his suffering as Jane had appeared to be. The maid Caroline was lost in admiration for his courage and heroism, and his adventure lost nothing

at her hands when she related it to Rosie and Miss Prosser on their return from church. The former was naturally full of concern for her brother's bruises, which were really very extensive, and entreated him to go back to his chambers and have them attended to at once.

At first he hesitated. He felt as if he could not leave Chelsea before he had had an explanation with Jane. But, on second thoughts, he decided to go. The girl had had sufficient excitement for one day. An interview with him, under the present circumstances, could but excite her more. He determined, therefore, humanely to let her rest until the morrow. But before he left he called for pen and ink, and indited the following epistle. The change which had taken place in his feelings could be traced from the very words that it contained.

"MY DEAR JANE,—

"I leave the cottage this afternoon much against my will, but because I think that rest will be the best thing for you at present. To-morrow, however, I shall hope to see you again. I have something of importance to say to you that concerns us both, therefore I trust you will make arrangements for our having an uninterrupted interview.

"Believe me,

"Ever yours faithfully,

"WILFRID EWELL."

He had never presumed to dictate any of her actions to her since their separation, and Jane, when she received this letter, was at a loss to understand what it could possibly mean. She had almost forgotten what had taken place under the terrible attack of excitement which her fears for Nellie's safety had induced. She was totally unaware that Sir Wilfrid had overheard anything at a moment when she believed herself to be alone. And consequently she was quite unprepared for the searching catechism to which he subjected her as soon as they met.

His note did not mention any time, and she thought he would visit them at his usual hour in the afternoon. Instead of which, he appeared early in the morning.

Jane, who had been suffering all night from one of her nervous headaches, was still in her dressing-gown, with her

brown hair loose upon her shoulders, when Sir Wilfrid was announced. The child was playing at her feet, and Mrs. Warner was moving about the room, dusting her marine treasures, and talking to the portrait of the deceased lieutenant.

Rosie had given Jane a vivid description of the injuries her brother had sustained in his gallant rescue of Nellie, and as he entered the door she perceived that he limped.

"Why did you come over this morning?" she said compassionately. "You should have stayed at home and rested your leg. I am afraid I must have seemed very ungrateful yesterday, not to have thanked you better for the great service you did us; but I had no idea that you were hurt."

"And I had no wish that you should know it," he answered, seating himself. "And, indeed, my bruises are not worth so much pity at your hand. My valet is an excellent nurse, and he rubbed in some liniment last night which has almost set me right again."

Then he looked at her searchingly, as though he would find out if she had any suspicion of the discovery he had made.

But if so, she did not betray her knowledge. She was leaning back languidly in an arm-chair, very pale, and with eyes half-closed from pain. The print wrapper which she wore hung loosely on her figure, and Sir Wilfrid observed for the first time how very thin she had become. She had been a plump, healthy young woman in the days of their married life. Now, her shoulder-blades and collar-bones showed distinctly through the thin folds of her dress, and her arms had evidently lost all their rounded beauty.

"I am afraid you are suffering," he said presently, as he saw her brows contract.

"I have a nervous headache—I am used to them. But I did not think you would be here so soon, or I should have been dressed to receive you."

"I was too impatient to wait until the afternoon. Besides, I knew that my sister and Miss Prosser would be absent in the morning. You noted what I said about wishing to speak to you alone."

"Yes. Mother, will you kindly go down to Caroline, and stay there till I come to you?"

"Tell her to take the child with her," he interposed.

Jane's eyes opened.

"The child?"

"Yes. Miss Nellie is getting too sharp altogether. I should not care to tell any of my secrets before her."

Jane answered him by ringing the bell and desiring the servant to take both the old lady and the child away. Then they were alone together—really alone for the first time since he had deserted her. Jane's eyes glanced at him nervously as the door closed behind the banished trio.

"What can you possibly have to say to me?" she commenced.

"Only this. When I first saw Nellie I asked you whose child she was, and you said you did not know. Was that the truth?"

The woman looked as if she had been caught in a trap; but though taken utterly aback by the question, she made a gallant effort to escape.

"I told you that some one put her over our garden wall when she was a little baby, and we found her in the lily-bed—at least, mother did—and she had no idea to whom the child belonged. That is the truth."

"I don't want to hear anything about your mother. I want to hear *you* say that you do not know Nellie's parents. Jane, if there was one thing which I admired in your character more than another, it was your perfect truth and candour. Your soul seemed like a crystal lake to me. It was impossible for you to tell a lie. Tell me the truth now, I conjure you. Is Nellie *your* child?"

Jane's head drooped upon her bosom.

"Yes," she said in a low voice; "if you *must* know it, that is the truth. But no one else here knows it. No one suspects it even, unless it is Miss Prosser. Nellie is *my* child."

"You mean she is *our* child, Jane?"

"I think you might have spared me that question, Will."

"Forgive me, dear; I should have known you better. But why didn't you tell me of this sooner? It might have altered the whole course of our lives. You do not think, do you, Jane, that I should have been such a brute as to leave you to bear so heavy a burthen by yourself? My poor girl!"

"I did not know it myself, Will, until after—after all was over, and it was too late. There was nothing left for me then but to try and conceal it. So I went to Wales—to a dear old aunt of my father's, and she was like a mother to me. If it hadn't been for her kindness I think I should have died. But the thought of poor mother and of my little child sustained me. Don't call her a burthen, Will. She is my greatest blessing—the angel that God sent me to save my heart from breaking."

"And did you feel my desertion of you so much as all that, Jane?"

"Don't speak of it," she said between her teeth. "Let it be a forbidden subject between us."

"Dear little Nellie!" said Sir Wilfrid musingly; "my sweet child! There must have been some instinct in my heart to tell me she was mine, for I don't remember ever caring for an infant before. I shall love her doubly now. My own little girl!"

A sudden terror seemed to grip the mother's heart. She rose up from her chair, and turned upon him like an animal at bay.

"You will not take her from me!" she cried fiercely.

Sir Wilfrid placed his hand upon her arm, and forced her to reseal herself.

"No, no," he replied soothingly, "you need not fear. I have not the power, Jane, even if I had the intention. You poor unrecognised mothers have one advantage over those who stand higher in the world's esteem than yourselves. Your wrongs set you above the tyranny or the cruelty of man, and your children are your own. How can you think so basely of me, Jane? Has that one wicked act of mine changed my whole character in your estimation?"

"You say that you *cannot* take her from me—not even legally?" demanded Jane, with fear still gleaming in her eyes.

"Not even legally, There is no law that can bind me to either of you. In my shortsightedness and folly I cut the knot, instead of drawing it more closely.

"*Thank God!*" ejaculated Jane, as she lay back in the chair and closed her eyes.

"Jane," said Sir Wilfrid, "those two words are the very bitterest reproach your lips could have conveyed to me."

"I did not mean them to be so, Will. But Nellie is all I have. You cannot be surprised at my gratitude to learn that she is all my own."

"In a legal point of view she certainly is. But you will not any longer deny me my rights of paternity, Jane."

"What do you mean? You surely would not have me tell the world. Have I not borne enough, without having disgrace and shame added to it? Would you lower me in the sight of my friends?"

"Heaven forbid! On the contrary, I would be the first to shield your name. But I cannot permit you to go on working for the support of my child without receiving any assistance from me. You have taken too much on your hands, Jane. You are brave and courageous, but you must think of Nellie as well as yourself. As she grows older she will need education, and dress, and many other things which I, as her father, have a right to supply her with. I am rich, and you are poor. You must let me make a settlement on the child sufficient for the wants of you both."

She shook her head.

"It is *impossible*, Will. The very fact of your settling money upon Nellie would make your relationship to her patent to the world. She is supposed to be a little waif and stray—cast by a freak of fortune on our care, to share such goods as the gods may provide us with, and no more. And as it has begun, so it must go on. I utterly refuse—now and for ever—all assistance at your hands, either for myself or her."

"That is your *pride* speaking, Jane, and not your *heart*," replied Sir Wilfrid; "and when you think it over quietly, you will see how unjust your decision is for the child. Is Nellie to grow up half educated, half fed, and half clothed, when I am ready to-morrow to settle a competency for life upon her? Will she thank you for it, do you think, in future days? Should she ever come to you when of an age to understand such things, and demand to know who was her father and her mother, will you tell her the same fable you first told to me? And if she has a proud, determined spirit—like your own, Jane—and resolves to find out the truth for herself, will she be grateful to you when she hears what she has lost? Come, my dear, look at this in a reasonable light. Nellie is my only child, you know,

and likely, as far as I can see, to remain so. I have not much more pleasure in my life than you have, although, doubtless I deserve it less. Don't rob me of more than is absolutely necessary. Let me have the poor satisfaction of knowing that I maintain you and my child.

Jane rose to her feet again. She was determined to tell him all the truth, but it was very difficult. Her heart beat so fast she thought it would choke her. But she held one hand pressed on it to check its throbbing, and with the other she steadied herself against the chair.

"No!" she repeated firmly, "*no!* I have taken all this into consideration, and still I answer *no!* Neither Nellie nor I will ever accept money at your hands, Will, for you would give it us as a favour when it is ours by *right*."

He started at that, and would have spoken, but she prevented him.

"Listen to me, Will; and then answer me as you think fit. After two years' total silence and separation you sought me out, and asked my leave to visit at this house as a friend. I granted it—not because it was my wish, but because I was anxious to keep my secret, and not do anything to attract suspicion to me. You thought, perhaps, because I yielded so easily, that I had ceased to feel or to regret—that I had overcome my first frenzied passions of jealousy, revenge and despair, and learned to acknowledge that you had right on your side, because you had *law*, and that a miserable legal quibble had freed you from the oath you took to God to cherish me to your life's end. It is untrue! I have *not* forgotten, and I have not *forgiven!* I told you, when you resolved upon a step which must have been alike repugnant in the eyes of God and man, that I was *your wife*, that no other woman could be so, and that, in like manner, I should consider myself bound to you until death dissolved the tie between us. I think so still! Whatever the law may say, I believe that my right name is Jane Ewell, that my proper place is at Lambscote Hall, and that I ought to enjoy the whole of the fortune of which you offer me a share. Therefore I will take none, and neither shall my child! I have been wrong to let you come here—to indulge myself even with the sound of your voice or the sight of your face. But the past, Will—the past is *very hard to forget!* You left me of your own accord. You deserted me in the very

midst of all my love for you, when I had never done a thing nor said a word, that I am aware of, that was unbecoming my duty as a wife to you. You broke my heart! I say it without any feeling of humiliation, for I never disguised my love for you. But you see I have lived on—without any hope and with little interest in life, but still I have lived. And the one cord to bind me to earth has been our child—your lawful daughter, Will. I will have her called by no name less worthy of her than that. And now you come—you, who have robbed me of everything—life, hope, companionship—you come and offer to settle a competency upon me—a bandage for my broken heart, a salve for my outraged pride, a compensation for having brought your child into the world! Well, I refuse it! I have managed to live without your assistance through my despair. I will manage to live without it till death mercifully releases me from the burden of life. You would doubtless like to occupy the position of Sir Wilfrid Ewell, the owner of Lambcote, and the husband of the beautiful Lady Ewell, in the eyes of the world, and to have this poor cottage to creep to as a refuge when you are weary of Society, to bask in the smiles of your innocent child, and to receive perhaps, too, my welcome, as a comfortable pledge that you had never done anything to reproach yourself with regarding us. But it cannot be, Will. Your proper place is with the woman you call your wife, and from this day I request you will not come here again. You have discovered the truth. Be satisfied with it. I do not think it will make you any happier, but it need not add to your remorse. Think of us living here contentedly, if nothing more. But only *think* of us, for I must decline to receive you again at Wolsey Cottage."

This decision took Sir Wilfrid entirely by surprise. It was the very last thing he had expected to happen in consequence of his discovery of Nellie's parentage.

"But, Jane," he stammered, "you gave me leave to visit you. What will Rosie—what will everyone think, if you now reverse your decision?"

"Let them think what they choose. Because I have done wrong, is no reason I should not set it right. Your sister can go and see you, and, for the rest, I take the responsibility on myself."

"And you turn me out again, then," he said sorrowfully, "just when so great a joy seemed to be opening before me. You cannot suppose, Jane, that I have not felt what you have just said. Every word went home like the barbed point of an arrow. I know that in leaving you I committed a bitter wrong—that I sinned irremediably—that I was a liar, a coward, a brute! You cannot heap a single name upon me that I should think too severe. But I was mad at the time—as mad as the drunkard who has filled himself with liquor until his senses have deserted him! I was intoxicated with the fumes of flattery and the arts of love by which I was surrounded, until I was beside myself, and could not distinguish right from wrong. It is no excuse, but it is true. Knowing our marriage to be illegal, I grew to look upon it as a *liaison* which should be broken, for the sake of my new prospects. You know what followed. But oh, Jane! do you think that I have been happy? Even through the so-called honeymoon, your eyes and your voice haunted me, like some reproachful ghost that refused to be exorcised. And a curse has followed that ill-fated marriage. My wife has never cared for me—I have asked for bread and received a stone!—and I have known long since the fatal mistake I made in giving up you for her. We are never likely to live together again. Each day increases the distance between us. Oh, Jane! *you are my real wife!* You say so yourself. You are the only woman I have ever loved! Come back to me! Forgive my sin against you. I will expiate it by the faith of a lifetime! Only come back and let me feel once more that I have one heart to love me—one heart on which to rest without fear of dishonour or untruth!"

"*Come back to you!*" she repeated slowly; "*come back to you! How?*"

"As my wife, dearest! As the sharer of everything that I possess."

"But you say our marriage was void, and that I am *not* your wife, Will! In what capacity do you intend to place me at Lambcote Hall?"

He hung his head, abashed by her searching glance.

"Oh, I am very unhappy!" he moaned. "I am cursed of God and man! I wish I could put an end to my miserable existence!"

"Will," she said gently, "a wrong was never set right by

adding to it a greater wrong. As you said just now, you cut of your own free will the cord that bound us together, and there is little chance that it will ever be united again in this life. But this life is not everything, Will. It contains but a very small portion of our troubles or our joys. Make it as light as you can, by doing the duty you carved out for yourself. And though I do not wish you to come here again (for it is good for neither of us), remember that I revoke the words I said just now, that I forgive you freely, and that I shall always be your friend. And I shall pray for you, Will—my dear, *dear* Will!—until my very life's end!"

"Mayn't I kiss the child before I go?" he said in a broken voice.

Her answer was to go downstairs and bring up little Nellie in her arms.

Sir Wilfrid looked at them—his own possessions, and yet so far removed from him—with eyes blinded with tears, and lips that trembled too much to speak. Then he kissed them both, the mother and the child, solemnly as though he were bidding them an eternal farewell, and, without a word, passed from the front door into the road beyond.



CHAPTER XXXIV.

CURED.

It was a difficult task for Jane to apprise Rosie of what had taken place without letting her guess too much of the truth. All she ventured to say was that she thought Sir Wilfrid was spending a great deal of time at the cottage, and had felt herself called upon to give him a hint not to come there so often.

"He used to ask my advice sometimes in the old days, you know, Rosie," she said with a sad smile, "and I always gave it him as honestly as I could. I really think it is wrong of him not to seek a reconciliation with Lady Ewell. This separation places them both in a very false position, and will lead to unmerited scandal; and I dare say he was in the wrong as well as she."

"I hope you were not too hard upon dear Wilfrid, Jane," replied Rosie wistfully; "because, you know, you *can* 'let fly' when you choose, and he has so much trouble—poor fellow!"

"I gave him my advice with a view to saving him more, Rosie. He doesn't seem to me to be taking any steps to make up this quarrel with his wife. His talk is only of the races he has attended, or the plays he has seen, or the bachelor-parties he has taken part in. And the longer the rupture lasts, the harder it will be to mend,"

"If you knew what a *wretch* Lena is, Jane, you would say the best thing would be for them never to meet again. Such a conceited, stuck-up thing! I saw her in the Park yesterday with Lady Otto. They were sitting in the carriage as if they had two pokers stuck down their backs; and Lena was painted up to the eyes. I cannot bear her."

"They didn't see you, Rosie, did they?"

"No; I wish they had. I had a great mind to nod to them, only I remembered it would be too great a compliment. Fancy their horror at being nodded to by a girl out of a photograph-shop!"

"Rosie, dear," said Jane, after a pause, "I should be

awfully sorry to lose you, but I *wish* you'd offer to go back to your brother ; at all events, until his wife returns. Don't you think it might be the saving of him ? He will ruin himself with the set he has got amongst if some woman does not take pity on him."

"Why don't you take pity on him yourself ? Change your mind, and go and be housekeeper at Lambscote, *vice* Mrs. Greenwood deposed. Wilfrid would return to the paternal acres in that case like a shot."

Rosie had commenced jestingly, but perceiving the serious look on her friend's face, she thought it best to be serious too.

"Joking apart, Jane, whilst Lena is in the way, I do not see the fun of making myself a target to be shot at. The very fact of knowing I was at Lambscote would make her return there out of sheer obstinacy. Wilfrid has already asked me to do so, and I have refused. He has offered to support me, and I have refused that also. I prefer to work for myself. Since he has endowed Lena with all his worldly goods, let her enjoy them. I have no wish to share anything that is hers."

"I should feel just the same under the same circumstances," said Jane Warner. "You seem to grow more like my sister every day, Rosie. It would go to my heart to part with you."

"I never mean to part from *you*, Jane, until you kick me out. If you were married to-morrow, I would go and keep house with you without the slightest fear. *We* shall never quarrel, thank God ! We have passed through too much real trouble to fight over trifles."

"But you are quite cured of that old fancy, are you not, Rosie ?"

"Quite, darling—thanks to you."

"No, no ! Say thanks to your own good sense ; no woman can cure another of love. But if the object is unworthy, the predilection generally dies a natural death."

"Mine *was* unworthy," said Rosie thoughtfully ; "I can see that plainly now. He was a bad man, and he never cared for me. I am very glad it is all over."

"What a good thing it would be if every girl who had misplaced her affections could say the same !" responded Jane, with a sigh.

But Rose did not understand from this conversation that

her brother had been altogether forbidden to visit at the cottage, and when seven or eight days went by without his making his appearance there, she began to feel surprised.

"What *can* have become of Wilfrid, Jane?"

"I told you, dear, that I had asked him not spend so much time with us."

"But is he *never* to come here?"

"I think it would be as well if he did not."

"I must go and see him then," said Rosie; "so don't expect me home to tea this evening, Jane."

She guessed that something more had transpired between Jane and Wilfrid than had been disclosed to her, and determined to find out the truth; so, as soon as her day's work was completed, she took her way to the Strand.

Sir Wilfrid's valet, Harvey, met her with a grave face. His master had been out a great deal during the last ten days, he said—a *very great* deal—and had kept late hours, and he was afraid he must have taken a chill. He had looked very poorly that morning when the valet took up his hot water—so much so, that Harvey had brought a doctor to his bedside; and the doctor had said Sir Wilfrid must not dream of getting up. And, indeed—concluded the man mysteriously—he did not think there would be much trouble in the matter, as his master was altogether too ill to stand.

This account frightened Rosie, who had not been used to sickness in her family.

Sir Wilfrid and his sisters were a remarkably strong and healthy set, and the valet's narrative appeared very alarming to her. She insisted upon proceeding to the bedside of her brother, to which Harvey courteously conducted her. She found Sir Wilfrid very feverish and very cross—a state induced as much by his dissipation and his losses as by anything else.

The valet, before he retired, inquired whether there was anything he could do for his master.

"Bring me a brandy-and-soda," said the baronet peevishly; "and are there any letters, Harvey?"

"No more letters, Sir Wilfrid."

"Very good. Order some tea for Miss Ewell, and don't let anyone in here whilst she is with me."

"You will not admit any more visitors to-night surely, Sir Wilfrid?" said Harvey.

"No—unless any of my friends *particularly* want to see me ; in which case they can wait, if they feel inclined, till my sister has gone."

Left alone with her brother, Rosie found him very disinclined to talk. He appeared to be sullen or morose—a mood which her affectionate heart attributed entirely to his condition. He did not mention Jane Warner or the cottage, and when Rosie alluded to her friends he made no reply. She stayed by his side for nearly an hour, trying to cheer him up and to persuade him to take a change to the seaside as soon as his feverish attack should have passed away. But Sir Wilfrid met all her proposals with a gesture of impatience or dissent. After a while the girl, seeing he looked drowsy, wisely held her tongue.

In a few minutes he slept, and as soon as Rosie was convinced his sleep was sound, she rose lightly from her seat, and, turning down the lamp, left the chamber.

Sir Wilfrid's sitting-room was on the opposite side of the passage, and she entered it to fetch her hat and gloves. As soon as she had turned the handle of the door she saw that it was occupied. A man stood with his back towards her, looking out of the window, which commanded a view of the Thames. As she entered, believing her to be the man-servant, he demanded curtly, and without changing his position :

"Well—can Sir Wilfrid see me now?"

"I beg your pardon," said Rosie bashfully, "but my brother is asleep."

The man at the window turned round quickly, and peered eagerly at her through the falling dusk.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed; "is it possible? Yes, it *must* be!"

And Rosie Ewell felt every drop of blood in her body rush to her face as she recognised the voice and figure of Captain Dorsay. He advanced towards her impressively, and took her hand as though he had no doubt whatever of the welcome he should receive.

"Fancy it's being *you*!" he said, as he pressed it warmly. "Harvey told me that Ewell had one of his sisters with him, but I concluded naturally that it was one of the Surbiton party. Sir Wilfrid never even told me that he had found you. What a pleasant surprise! And *you*, Rosie—are you not glad to see me again?"

But Rosie was not disposed to be responsive. She drew her hand back abruptly, and answered in a low voice :

"No."

Two or three years form an age in the calculations from sixteen to twenty, and as the girl's eyes were timidly raised to the face and figure which had so enthralled her childish fancy, she was almost ready to wonder how she could ever have been attracted by them. Probably the intervening space had not improved the personal appearance of Captain Dorsay ; for he was not young, and men who live a life like his age fast and decay early.

What Rosie saw before her now was a man between forty and fifty, with the remains of beauty certainly, but very little remains of youth. His hair was scanty, and flecked with grey ; his eyes bloodshot and dropsical-looking, and his complexion had lost all its freshness. He carried with him that air of fashion, certainly, which in the opinion of Society covers a multitude of personal sins.

But though he looked a gentleman from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, he had passed the age for posing as a hero of romance in the eyes of an unsophisticated maiden, whose Prince Charming must always be young and handsome, if he be nothing else.

Jack Dorsay, however, was probably not aware of how greatly he had deteriorated since he had met Rosie Ewell last, for her answer seemed to take him completely by surprise.

"No?—not glad to see me?" he repeated incredulously. "Oh, nonsense! I can't believe *that*. You are a great deal too good and too charming to be so cruel! Why, I remember when you used to meet me in the park at Lambscote I thought you the most amiable, as well as the prettiest, little girl I had ever seen. And you are a thousand times prettier now—by Jove, you are!"

"Captain Dorsay," said Rosie, raising her burning face to his, "please don't speak of that time. I hoped that you had forgotten it long ago."

"*Forgotten it!* My dear child, as if I ever *should* forget it! Nor the deucedly unpleasant way in which that spiteful creature, Lady Ewell, put an end to it all. I have been longing to see you ever since, Rosie. If you hadn't bolted from us in that mysterious manner I should have had an

explanation with you long ago. You didn't believe what Lena said, did you? She was simply mad with jealousy, and some women will tell any falsehoods to gain their own way. You were never so foolish as to think she spoke the truth?"

"I did more than *think* it, Captain Dorsay—I *know* she spoke the truth. And if it were not for my poor brother's sake, I should say that it makes no difference to me now whether she did so or not."

"It made a difference to you *then*, Miss Ewell."

"Yes, I know it did," she replied simply. "I thought you were everything that is good and true, and it seemed hard to lose you. But I see things more plainly now, and I am very glad it ended as it did."

"You do not think of *me*," said Captain Dorsay jealously. "You do not ask what *I* have suffered, nor if *I*, too, am thankful that it ended as it did."

"It is not necessary to do so. I am convinced you do not suffer."

"Why?"

"Because if you had one kind thought left in connection with that time, Captain Dorsay, you would not be the bad friend to my poor brother that you are."

"What do you mean by a *bad friend*? Sir Wilfrid, I am happy to say, classes me amongst his best; and I can truly affirm that I have the greatest regard for him."

"*Regard!*" echoed the girl indignantly. "Regard for *what*, Captain Dorsay? For his health, or his pocket, or his morals? Ah! I am not such a child as you think me. I have grown in knowledge, you see, since those days, and my eyes have opened to the wickedness of the world. You call yourself Wilfrid's 'friend,' and I tell you you are his greatest enemy. He never used to bet, nor gamble, nor drink before he knew you. You are taking advantage of his unhappy position, in being separated from his wife, to tempt him on to all kinds of excess. Lena is a bad wife to him, it is true—a cold and false and deceitful woman; but she does him less harm than you are doing. And you say you *cared for me*? Why, Captain Dorsay, though you trifled so cruelly with my feelings when my eyes were blinded to your many faults, I would not—for the sake of the memory of the time when I believed in you—treat a *dog* of yours with so little consideration as you treat my brother."

The girl was crying now quietly to herself, and Dorsay walked up and down the room, smitten by the truth of her words, and not knowing what to answer to them. At last he stopped before her.

"Have you anything more to say?" he asked.

"Yes, if I thought that you would listen."

"I *will* listen to every word. Say just what you please, Rosie."

"Then, Captain Dorsay, if you ever liked me, even a little, will you grant me a favour?"

"I will grant anything that is in my power."

"Will you leave Wilfrid alone for the future? Will you go away somewhere, and write and tell him it was all wrong, and you mean to give it up—and ask him to give it up too?"

"He would never believe me," laughed Dorsay.

"Oh yes, he would! My brother has a good heart, and is always ready to believe the best of everybody. He is very unhappy about Lena just now. I don't think he loves her, but his pride is hurt by her keeping away, and he joins in all these dissipations to drown thought and care. But if *you* were away, I am sure that he would leave them off."

"I am Mephistopheles, in point of fact," said Dorsay.

"Yes; I think you have been *that* to Wilfrid," sighed Rosie.

"And if I should comply with your wishes, Rosie, what is to be my reward?" he said presently.

She started, and looked at him.

"*Reward*, Captain Dorsay! You surely would not claim a reward for doing your duty?"

"Indeed I would if I could get it. Your words, child, have moved me strangely. I know I must have appeared to have acted a double part at Lambscote, but I was not so guilty as you may imagine. What Lady Ewell said was true. I could not have married you, though not for the reason which she intended you to believe—that I was in love with herself. That was a complete mistake. I loved *you*, Rosie, at that moment, and you only. Will you believe me?"

"It little matters," she said gently. "It is all past now."

"But will you believe me?"

"Yes; if you wish it to be so."

"And will you believe also that, if I do as you ask me, I shall do it for the sake only of the love I bore you?"

"Yes," faltered Rosie.

"Oh, if it might have been gratified!" exclaimed Dorsay. "If I might have taken the innocent flower of your love to my heart, and let it bloom there, I think it would have purified it from all evil. I have dreamed of you, child, since we parted. I have felt your pure kisses upon my face, your whispered entreaties that I should abstain from evil in my ears, until I have almost gone mad with thinking. And now—*now* you tell me you never cared for me."

"Oh, no!" she cried, springing to his side; "I never said *that*. I never meant it. I *did* love you as much as it was in my childish nature to love; but you tore the veil from my eyes with your own hand, and the shock that followed it was too great. It killed all feeling in me for you, Dorsay, except such interest as I must always cherish for my fellow-creatures. I have told you the truth. It is a hard one, perhaps. It cost me many tears before I arrived at it. But, by the suffering you imposed upon me, I entreat you to spare my brother further pain."

"I *will*," he answered firmly; "I swear it before Heaven. I will leave England, as you ask me to do; and I will not see Sir Wilfrid again."

"How can I sufficiently thank you?" she said through her tears. "What can I do, to show my gratitude?"

"Think of me, sometimes, child, and as kindly as you can. And if, at some future day, when Ewell is once more safely settled at Lambcote, he should invite me down there, don't refuse me the right hand of friendship."

"Indeed—*indeed* I will not," she answered, holding out her own; "for now I shall really look upon you as my brother's friend. And when will you leave town—to-night?"

"How anxious you are to get rid of me!" he laughed. "No, not to-night, but certainly to-morrow. Sleep in peace to-morrow, Rosie, under the assurance that the ocean rolls between us."

And, with a farewell pressure of her hand, he was gone.

CHAPTER XXXV.

NEMESIS.

LADY EWELL was seated in the drawing-room at Onslow Gardens that evening, with something like pleasure depicted on her pallid countenance. There had been a marked change in her appearance during the progress of the last few months, palpable even to those who held daily intercourse with her. Nothing so rapidly ages a woman, and destroys her beauty, as the use of anæsthetics. They possess as destructive a power as stimulants, and sometimes a more fatal one. Lena was evidently attired with the greatest care. Her dress was perfect, and her golden tresses as attractive as ever. But though veloutine and other cosmetics had been liberally used on her beautifully formed features, they were powerless to hide the ravages which her unfortunate predilection had caused. Her eyes were glazed and heavy, and her eyelids puffed and swollen. The back of her hands, too, had the same appearance, as though water had formed under the skin. Her complexion was very white—a dull, thick white, on which the rouge refused to remain, or in which it seemed to sink as soon as applied—a frequent occurrence when people are out of health. Added to this, her gait was frequently unsteady, or her sight seemed suddenly to fail her, and she would be forced to put out her hands and grasp the first article with which they came in contact, to save herself from falling. On this occasion, however, she seemed more like herself, as her eyes and ears were constantly on the alert to know what went on below, and she found it impossible to rivet her attention on the novel she held in her hand.

"What is the matter, Lena?" inquired Lady Otto anxiously. "Do you expect anyone to-night?"

"Oh no! It is nothing—nothing," she said, with ready deceit.

"You are looking very ill, my dear. I am really distressed by your appearance. I wish you would take Dr. Marshall's advice, and go to the seaside for a few days," continued her mother.

"Oh! don't worry, mamma," was the impatient rejoinder, "and please don't stare at me in that way. I can't see any difference in my looks, unless it is that I am rather pale. And everyone is pale in London during the season. How could it be otherwise?"

Lady Otto returned to her work with a sigh, and Lena resumed her attitude of expectation. The person she expected was Captain Dorsay. After a perfect siege of invitations and reproaches the fortress had capitulated, and he had consented to visit her. He had only done so, however, for his own peace of mind. Lady Ewell's correspondence and messengers had become a nuisance to him. He was afraid, moreover, lest her *penchant* should become patent to Society, and reach the ears of her husband. Friends are always so obliging in repeating exactly the piece of intelligence that one wishes not to be told. And until this very evening, when Lena sat in the drawing-room in momentary expectation of his arrival, Captain Dorsay had had his own reasons for not wishing to break with Sir Wilfrid Ewell.

So he had promised to pay her a visit. And he had meant that visit to be anything but a pleasant one. He had made up his mind to tell Lady Ewell plainly that their intimacy must come to an end, and that he had no intention of giving up his friendship with her husband on her account, nor of hearing his own name spoken of in Society in connection with hers. It would have been a very stormy and violent interview had it taken place, for Lena was by no means mistress of her temper, and when she flew into a rage she did not care *who* heard her, nor what scandal she might be the means of creating. But after meeting Rosie Ewell, Captain Dorsay decided not to go to Onslow Gardens. The man had some good traits in him, and one was that although he was very lax in indulging his fancies, he did not follow vice for its own sake.

So he wrote to Lady Ewell instead. As he had promised to leave England for a time, her morbid passion for him would not have an opportunity of venting itself, and his absence would obviate the necessity of telling her some unpalatable truths. So that his letter contained no allusion to anything more personal than his proposed departure. But it was none the more welcome to Lena on that account. She received it by the latest post, and when her patience was

nearly exhausted by waiting for him. It contained but a few words—and those courteous ones—but they seared her vanity like a red-hot iron.

“MY DEAR LADY EWELL,—

“I am unfortunately prevented from waiting upon you this evening as I intended to do, and I must ask you to accept my apologies on paper. I have received news that obliges me immediately to go abroad, and the time of my absence from England is uncertain. I called at Sir Wilfrid's chambers this afternoon, and was sorry to learn that he is confined to his bed with an attack of fever. As I leave London early to-morrow to cross by the night-mail from Dover to Calais, and have a great deal to do beforehand, I am sure you will kindly forgive my not calling to say good-bye to you and Lady Otto in person.

“Sincerely yours,

“J. DORSAY.”

That was all. Not one word of remembrance or affection! Not one wish expressed to hear from her! Not one hint as to where he was going, or to whom! Lena's hands dropped the sheet of note-paper upon her lap as if they were powerless to hold it.

“Anything the matter, my dear?” said her mother inquisitively.

She knew her daughter's moods by heart, and was certain that the letter was in some way connected with her unusual excitement, and that disappointment had been the result of it.

“*Matter!*” repeated Lena snappishly; “what should be the matter? Cannot I receive a letter without making its contents patent to the world?”

“Certainly, my love, certainly. I thought perhaps might be some communication from Sir Wilfrid.”

“Sir Wilfrid troubles me with a great many communications, doesn't he?” said Lena, with a sneer.

“He would write oftener if he thought you cared to hear from him, my dear. I am sure of that. I think you are treating your husband very ill, Lena, and playing your cards very badly. He is very fond of you, and he gave you every

possible liberty at Lambscote, and every possible indulgence.

"If you can't find anything newer to say than that, mamma, you'd better say nothing at all."

"But I wish to know for certain what you intend to do, Lena, for this state of things cannot go on for ever."

"What can you have to complain of, mamma? Sir Wilfrid pays you very handsomely, and regularly. I will say *that* for him."

"He is more generous than I wish him to be," replied Lady Otto. "It is not money I am thinking of, but your reputation. You have now been with me for eight months, and people are beginning to talk. They do not believe any longer in your stories about your health. They say that if you are ill, your proper place is by the side of your husband."

"Does all this tirade mean that you are tired of keeping me here, mamma?"

"It means that I am tired of hearing what your friends say about it, and that I do not think I should be justified in sanctioning it any longer. The Duke thinks just as I do. I had a long letter from him yesterday, and he says the way you are behaving to Sir Wilfrid is a scandal. Therefore, what I want to know is, do you intend to return to Lambscote Hall when the season is over, or not?"

"Supposing that I do *not* intend it, mamma, what then?"

"Then your husband must find a home for you elsewhere, for I will not take you abroad with me."

"You turn me out of your house, mamma?"

"No, Lena, do not say that. You are my only child, and if I have not been a good mother to you, the fault lies with my bringing-up, and not with my feelings. I have always loved you, and been proud of you. It is for that reason that I cannot bear to hear the unkind things that are said of you now. Besides, I urged you to marry Sir Wilfrid Ewell. I believed you had every prospect of being happy with him, and I believe so still, if you would be reasonable. But you are behaving with unnecessary cruelty, and I refuse to abet you any longer. And I intend—by the Duke's advice—to write and tell Sir Wilfrid my whole mind on the subject to-morrow."

Lena rose languidly from her seat, and said, apparently with the utmost indifference :

"Very well, mamma, do just as you please. It's all the same to me." And she passed upstairs to her own room, leaving Lady Otto wringing her hands, and saying : "What *shall* I do with her ? What *shall* I do with her ? She seems turned to stone."

But when she, too, retired to rest, she altered her mind.

Lady Ewell's maid tapped at her door with a little note, saying :

"From my mistress, my lady. She told me not to wait for an answer," and thereupon disappeared.

The written words were as follows :

"DEAR MAMMA,—

"I have been thinking of what you said just now, and perhaps you are right. Give me a day or two to make up my mind. I feel too ill at present to argue the matter. I shall go down to the sea to-morrow, as you advised me, with my maid, for a couple of days, and think it over. Don't write to Sir Wilfrid till I return, and don't offer to come with me. I wish to be quite alone.

"Your affectionate

"LENA."

As Lady Otto perused this note the tears rose to her eyes with gratification. She thought that Lena saw the sense of her arguments at last, and resolved not to interfere with anything her daughter might wish to do in the furtherance of her plans. She knew from experience that Lena was very apt, if thwarted in the slightest degree, to throw up a project altogether, and she dreaded lest anything should arise to prevent her coming to a right issue in this matter. She simply wrote back, therefore, "Do just as you like, my love, in everything," and laid her head on her pillow, satisfied that she had won the victory. She was not prepared, however, on rising the next morning, to find that Lady Ewell and her maid were already gone.

In general, Lena lay so late in bed that Lady Otto had made sure of seeing her before her departure. She had carelessly, too, omitted to leave word of her destination. Perhaps she had not decided on it when she left home. Anyway, she

was gone for reflection and decision, and Lady Otto was blissfully certain that all would be right. She was not gifted with the prophetic vision of the seers of old.

Meanwhile, Lena and her maid were speeding down to Dover. The infatuated woman had decided that she must speak to Captain Dorsay before he left England, and no consideration of shame or propriety deterred her. She instinctively felt that he would put up at the best hotel in the town. Jack Dorsay never catered for anything so well as his own comfort and convenience. So, on arrival, she ordered her cabman to drive to the second best, where she ordered a meal, for the sake of appearances, for her servant and herself. When it was over she put on a thick veil and went out for a walk. She ordered the maid to await her return in the hotel. She had no intention of being either watched or followed. When Lena was clear of the premises she walked rapidly in the direction of the principal hotel, and asked if Captain Dorsay was staying there. There was some little consultation amongst the waiters, and then the answer came in the negative.

"But he is coming here to-day, surely?"

"Yes, madam; we expect the captain about five. His dinner is ordered for seven o'clock. He crosses by the night mail to Calais."

"So I thought. Thank you. That is all."

"Shall you call again, madam?"

"I do not know. I am only passing through the town. I may not have time."

"Any name, madam?"

"It is of no consequence. Good afternoon."

The waiters gazed after her significantly.

"Queer Street, eh? Always the way with the captain. He never comes down here but there are half-a-dozen petticoats wanting his address. Blessed if I know how it is they scents him out!"

Lena went back to her hotel and rested till half-past five. Then she sallied forth again alone, and in the same direction. Captain Dorsay, who had only arrived a few minutes before, and was in the smoking-room enjoying a cigar, was astonished to hear that a lady wished to speak to him.

"*A lady!* Impossible! What's her name?"

"She didn't give any name, sir. I've shown her into a

private room. It's the second time she's been here to-day, sir, asking when you'd be down."

Jack Dorsay's first idea—a very wild one—was that Rosie's gratitude to him had developed itself in following him to Dover. He threw down his cigar and went quickly to the room indicated by the waiter. What was his disgust at recognising in his mysterious visitor the woman he thought he had so successfully eluded.

"You here, Lady Ewell!" he exclaimed, with most uncomplimentary emphasis. "What on earth has brought you down to Dover?"

"You have, Jack," she answered, "you only. Oh! what made you write me that cruel note? It has nearly driven me out of my senses."

"I think it must have driven you *quite* out of them, if it induced you to follow me here! Good Heavens! Do you know the risk you are running? Suppose your mother or your husband got wind of such an escapade, you would ruin yourself for nothing. In Heaven's name, Lena, let me entreat of you to go back at once to town!"

"And you would drive me forth again without a single word of kindness! You would leave England without even bidding me farewell! Oh, you are cruelly, *cruelly* changed!"

"I *am* changed, and you know it, and ought to rejoice at the improvement. You have reproached me bitterly for not keeping up my former intimacy with you. *What!* have you so little sense of honour as to wish me to make love to the wife, whilst I take the hand of her husband?"

Lena laughed harshly.

"*Honour!—honour!* For Heaven's sake, Jack, call things by their right names. Say you don't love me any longer, that you are sick of me, or you have found some woman who pleases you better; but don't try to defend your own fickleness on the charge of *honour*."

"Perhaps you are right," said Dorsay quietly. "Perhaps between people like you and me the simple truth is best. Well then, Lena—ungallant as it may seem to say so—I *am* tired of you. Tired of your scheming, your duplicity, your heartlessness, and, whatever you may do or say, we two shall never again be to one another what we have been."

She had asked for the truth, but when it came it seemed to madden her.

"No, no, Jack," she cried impulsively, "don't say that! Whatever I have been to others, I have never been untrue to you. And I cannot live without you, Jack. I have tried it, and it is impossible. It is killing me by inches."

"It is better it should kill you altogether, Lena, than lead you to the fiery gulf into which you would plunge yourself. Think of what you are! The granddaughter of a Duke, the daughter of a Lord, the wife of a Baronet, with blue blood running in every vein of your body. Such women as you are—born to the purple—owe more to Society than those of humbler origin. Your fall would be known all over England—would bring shame upon dozens of well-known faces. For God's sake pause, and go home again before this mad flight of yours is discovered."

"I will *not* go home!" she exclaimed passionately. "I will go with you—only with *you*! What do I care for my family or Society? Let them take care of themselves. Is my whole life to be wrecked and made miserable for the sake of a few long faces? I shall go with *you*."

"Then, if you are deaf to any claims of morality or affection, Lena, I tell you plainly that you shall *not go with me*."

"*What!* you reject me?"

"I *do* reject you—emphatically, and for ever! I would not be burdened with you for a day—or even an hour. I know what your temper and temperament are too well. You have no real love for anybody, Lena! The only person you care for is yourself!"

"Not so, Jack, and I will prove it. Take me abroad with you, make me your wife when the storm has blown over, and I will place every penny I possess unconditionally in your hands. To a man of your proclivities I could give no greater proof of my attachment!"

"*Make you my wife!* Never! Not if I were free ten times over. But I am *not* free! Mary Dorsay still lives, and will live long after I have sunk into an unhallowed grave."

Lady Ewell trembled with agitation.

"Your wife still lives? Lady Beauchamp assured me she was dead."

"A mere report. She is madder than ever, and stronger than ever. The two always go together. But were she dead in truth, Lena, it would make no difference to you."

"You despise me, then?"

"I *do* despise you—heartily! Listen to me. There was a time when you saw that my whole soul was becoming absorbed—wrongly, I confess, but still absorbed—in the fresh, simple affection of an innocent, pure-minded child. Had you come to me then, as a friend, and warned me, privately, against the ruin that I might bring upon myself and her, I should have been stayed in my downward path, and I should have honoured you for your interference. But you chose another method—one from which every honourable-minded woman would have shrunk. In order to wound her feelings and gratify your revenge, you disgraced me in her eyes, and you trampled on yourself. You opened her mind to evil of which it had never dreamt, and drove her—in horror—from the protection of her brother's home. Lena, I have never forgiven you that sin—and *I never will.*"

"I did it from love of you," she faltered.

"You did it from love of revenge. You thought to bind me more closely to yourself, and you lost me altogether. And your Nemesis has come upon you. I am leaving England to-day, solely at the request of Rosie Ewell."

"Have you seen her then? Is she found?" said Lena eagerly.

"She *is* found, and I have seen her," he answered. "And I thank Heaven, that has put it in my power to expiate a small portion of my crime against her. She has asked me to break off all intimacy with her brother or his family, and to leave England. I am going—and whilst *you* live, Lena, I shall never return."

"Is it *possible* you can have changed so totally to me as this?"

"I think so. I know that I have but one strong wish regarding you left, and that is, *never to see you again.*"

"It is all over, then," she said, in a voice choked with emotion, as she turned to the door. "Good-bye, Jack, for ever."

He let her go without further remonstrance, and went back to the smoking-room, only thankful that the interview was over. A few hours later, he was safely landed on the other side of the Channel.

Lady Ewell returned to her hotel, stupefied with the excitement she had passed through. She desired her maid to undress her at once, and put her to bed.

"Lady Otto *would* make me come down to the seaside," she said fretfully; "but I don't believe it agrees with me. My head aches fearfully."

"Your ladyship hasn't given it a fair trial yet," replied the maid soothingly; "and you are over-tired with the journey too. Your ladyship will feel ever so much better after a good sleep."

"Yes, I dare say I shall. Don't come till I ring my bell in the morning, Wilson, for I shall take all the rest I can."

But when eleven—twelve—and one o'clock struck on the following day, without Lady Ewell having given any sign of wakefulness, Wilson thought it would be as well to enter her bedroom, and see if she required anything. She found her (as she suspected) in the comatose condition induced by too large a dose of the fatal soporific she was in the habit of using. As the waiting-maid did not like to bear the responsibility of her mistress's state alone, she sent for a doctor to try and restore her animation, but his efforts were unsuccessful.

The same evening brought telegrams to Lady Otto St. Blase and Sir Wilfrid Ewell, summoning them at once to Dover. But the utmost speed they could command only brought them to the bedside of a corpse. And whether Lady Ewell had taken an overdose of chloral by accident or design remained a mystery that day and ever afterwards.



CHAPTER XXXVI.

WIFE.

It was more than twelve months since the events related in the last chapter had occurred.

The body of the beautiful Lady Ewell was lying at rest in the vault of her forefathers. Lady Otto St. Blase had taken up a permanent abode in Paris, and Captain Dorsay had never been heard of since the day of Lena's death.

June was once more shedding its wealth of scent and sound and colour over the land, and Lambscote had attained its highest stage of beauty. The trees in the park were rich with verdure; the bees were humming through the limes and chestnuts on the lawn, and the beds of flowers shone like living gems. Amidst it all sat Rosie Ewell, a broad-brimmed hat upon her head, her work in her hand, and a look of complete contentment on her face. She had now been a year at Lambscote with her brother. She had brought him down there after the terrible illness that followed the shock of his wife's sudden death—a ghost of his former self—and had nursed him back to health and strength again. And now there seemed but little more needed to make her happy. She revelled in the sunshine and the flowers. She adored the old hall and its park-like acres. And she thought—as she had always done—that Sir Wilfrid was the best and dearest and most loveable brother in the world. Yet there was just a little shade upon her brow that morning, as if she had received a tiny disappointment, as if a breath had passed over the clear waters of her life and sullied them. But the look disappeared as Sir Wilfrid came across the lawn to meet her. He was looking remarkably well and happy. The colour had returned to his face, the light to his eye. He was but six-and-twenty, but he might have been eighteen. Rosie could not help commenting on his appearance.

“My dear Wilfrid, how bonnie you look! Who would imagine you were the same miserable spectre I travelled down to Lambscote with this time last year? One could

almost count your bones then, and now you are positively growing fat."

A shade of pain passed over the Baronet's brow.

"Don't allude to it, Rosie. I suffered more than than you can imagine—more than I had thought was possible. God only knows how I pulled through it."

He raised his beautiful eyes to the sky as he spoke. All his passion for Lena had revived with her death. But it was a very different sort of feeling he held for her now, and one that would never injure any living woman more. Rosie never allowed her brother to dwell on the past if she could help it.

"I think the fever helped rather than hindered you," she said cheerfully. "When you took that terrible chill getting out of your bed to go down to Dover, I thought, myself, it was all over with you, and I was in despair. But I believe you are really stronger and healthier, Wilfrid, now than you were before. How thankful we should be!"

"It is all due to your careful nursing then, my dear little sister; and now comes your reward, Can't you guess from my face that I have some good news for you this morning?"

"I thought you seemed unusually merry."

"I feel so. I have just been going through the books with my bailiff, and I am once more free. The retrenchments of the last twelve months, in which you have so generously assisted me, have covered the deficiency caused by my gambling losses. Ah, Rosie! I shall never touch a card again."

"I am so glad to hear you say so, Wilfrid."

"Fancy my having risked this noble inheritance, and the means of keeping up the name of Ewell in the county! It would have come to that, dear, if I had continued in that mad fashion much longer. But I have recouped myself, and everything shall now be as it was before."

"Old Lambscote, in fact, is on its legs again."

"Yes; and old Lambscote means to run too, I shall get carriage-horses at once, Rosie, and a couple of hunters for myself for the season. And you shall have that chestnut filly, my dear girl, that we both admired so much at Millerton the other day."

"No, no, Wilfrid; I do not want it."

"I tell you *you shall have it!* Here have you been cooped

up with me all through the winter, without a carriage or a riding-horse, and with only that beastly old pony——”

“It *isn't* a beastly old pony! I won't have it abused. It has carried me—dear old thing, with its rough coat and its hard mouth!—through mud and mire for hours at a stretch, and never been obstinate or unwilling.”

“Never mind, you are to have the chestnut filly. Do you think I have been unmindful of the careful economy you have practised in looking after my household in order to make up for my wilful extravagance? It is mainly due to you, Rosie, that I am out of debt to-day. And will you refuse me the pleasure of seeing you share the luxuries in which we may now indulge ourselves?”

“You are too good to me,” murmured Rosie.

“And yet there is a tear. What is the matter?”

“Nothing of consequence. I am a little vexed, that is all.”

“Who has vexed you?”

“Jane.”

“And what has Jane done?”

“She refuses, again, to visit Lambcote. Of course she has a plausible excuse, but I cannot understand her not making an effort to renew our friendship. She used to seem so *very* fond of me. I am afraid her affection must have cooled.

“But that is not like Jane Warner.”

“I know it is not. That is what puzzles me. Why should she not come here?”

“She must have a reason. Jane never acts without a good reason for it.”

“She says she cannot leave her mother and the child. But I asked her to bring them both, if it was absolutely necessary. Still she writes that it is quite impossible.”

“Never mind; she will come some day, depend upon it. We will *make* her come.”

“I should feel as if something had gone out of my life, if anything happened to estrange me from Jane Warner,” cried Rosie warmly.

“Perhaps she is going to be married,” suggested Sir Wilfrid.

“*Married!* Who to? That creature Cobble?”

“Why not? You used to advocate his suit a year ago.”

“She shall *not* marry him; he's not half good enough for

THE HEART OF JANE WARNER.

her. Oh, Wilfrid ! you have made me miserable with the mere idea. I shall have no rest now until I know the truth."

"You'd better write and ask her, then," replied her brother, laughing. "But what do you think of this proposal of my mother to settle in Millerton?"

Rosie made a comical grimace.

"Well, as Millerton is seven miles off, and mamma will not be able to keep more than a pony-chaise, perhaps it may pass muster. But don't let them come nearer to us, Wilfrid, for goodness' sake!"

"I don't think we must oppose it, dear. It is true that my mother has not been very kind to either of us. But still, she *is* our mother, and affection is too rare a quality in our family for us to be able to afford to despise it. And now that Edith and Laura are married, and mother has consented to accept a little assistance from me, they will live very comfortably at Millerton."

"Yes; and Fanny and Mary can marry the curate."

"What, *both at once*, Rosie?"

"No, no, you stupid! one after the other. He's such a hideous creature, I am sure no one could long survive marrying him."

"Well, if it comes to pass, it will be a very pleasant family arrangement. I could never feel *quite* satisfied, you know, Rosie, whilst keeping all these good things to myself. It is only fair that my relations should come in for a share of them now and then, isn't it?"

Rosie glanced at her brother curiously, as though she were asking herself *who* had taught him to look upon life in so different a light from that in which he had formerly regarded it. But she made no remark upon the subject.

"And dear old Lambscote shall be itself again," continued Wilfrid joyously, "and hold up its head in the county as it ought to do."

"Ah! something else is needed to make old Lambscote *quite* itself again," said Rosie oracularly.

"Indeed! And what is that?"

"A mistress! You *must* marry again, Wilfrid. You know, it is a positive necessity."

"I suppose I *must*—some day," he answered carelessly.

But the observation seemed to have stirred up a thought in his breast which would not be put aside again. He fidgeted

about the lawn for some minutes, talking irrelevantly of his mother, and the chesnut filly, and the good times that were coming for Lambscote. And then, all at once, as though he could keep the secret no longer, he threw himself down upon the grass by his sister's side.

"About this marriage business, Rosie," he said nervously, as he drew closer and put his head in her lap; "I should like to say a few words to you."

"All right, dear," she answered with a kiss, and a caressing hand laid on his dark locks.

"I want to tell you a story—will you listen to me?"

"You know I will."

"It contains an episode in my early life—a very dark episode, Rosie; and, except that during this past year you have been so much my friend and counsellor, one that I should be ashamed to relate to you. You have always thought better of me than I deserved. You have believed me to be an honourable, generous man, incapable of a mean or unworthy action. You have judged me by your own standard. You will see now, when you have heard my story, that I am no better than a criminal."

"I don't believe it," said Rosie stoutly.

"Years ago, dear, when I was quite a lad—between nineteen and twenty—I was thrown in contact with a young girl, pure and innocent as yourself, but beneath me in birth and position. I fell in love with her, notwithstanding, and after awhile I married her."

"*What!*" exclaimed Rosie, in her surprise. "You were married, Wilfrid—married before you met Lena?"

"Just so. But hear me to the end. The marriage was a secret one. I knew how angry my father would be if he heard of it, and I was afraid of his displeasure. So I married her under an assumed name, when we were both under age, and I had to take a false oath in order to do it."

"*A false oath!*—oh! that was terrible! But, Wilfrid, what was her name?"

"Never mind her name. We lived together as man and wife for two years, and then I came into the title and estate. Talking the matter of my marriage over with my solicitor, Mr. Parfitt, I discovered that I had never been married at all."

"How could that be, Wilfrid?"

"There were legal informalities in the ceremony, Rosie—too intricate to explain to you now—which rendered it null and void. To all intents and purposes, therefore, I found that I was free."

"But you were not *really* free," interposed Rosie quickly. "Surely she was your wife, Wilfrid?"

"Ah, Rosie! that is the sad part of it. Did I not tell you that I am a criminal? Can you believe that your brother was so weak and so wicked as to rupture such a sacred tie? Yet I did do so."

"Oh! the poor girl! What did she say?"

"Don't ask me what she said. She opposed it with all the force of her strong love for me, but I refused to listen—and I deserted her! That is the secret of my life."

"Poor dear boy!" said Rosie compassionately, stroking his head. "How you must have suffered!"

"Yes, I *have* suffered, but less than I deserved. You know the rest. I met Lena and married her, and my marriage proved most unfortunate. Now it is all over, and I am free again. *What* shall I do? Give me your advice, dear little sister, and I will be guided by it."

"Have you met—that poor girl—your first wife—again, Wilfrid?" asked Rosie softly.

"Yes. I have met her again with a child of mine in her arms—bearing her lot patiently, nobly, uncomplainingly; as a good friend, a good daughter, a devoted mother, and a faithful wife! That is *how* I have met her again, Rosie."

"I have guessed it. I understand everything now. I know who you mean," cried his sister suddenly; "it is my darling Jane! There is no woman but her in the world so noble and grand as you have described this woman to be. Oh, my dear sister!—my dearest friend! Is it possible that you have borne all this suffering and wrong for our sakes?"

"Don't cry, Rosie—your tears sear my heart like red-hot iron! *She* doesn't cry over it, God bless her! She has learned to take me at my full value, and to know how small a loss she has sustained."

"Wilfrid, does she love you still?"

"I do not know. I have not dared to ask. Give me your counsel in the matter. Remember that she is not so highly born as we are, but—"

"But she is *a thousand times* more noble, in every sense of

the word," interposed his sister eagerly. "You ask for my advice, Wilfrid. Here it is, Go to her at once. Don't waste a day—an hour—a minute! Go to Jane and ask her, on your knees, to take you back to the shelter of her love again; and bring her here, as quickly as you can, to be my sister once more, and the blessing of your own life. Oh, Wilfrid! if you don't do this, and without delay, I will never call you by the name of brother more!"

He left her on the morrow, and it was not many weeks before he brought his second wife home to Lambscote, and installed her as the mistress of the Hall.

They live there still—as united and happy a family as is to be found on the broad, fair acres of England. There never was a more dignified nor gracious Lady Ewell than Jane Warner makes, and the county families have taken her on her own merits and forgotten to make any impertinent inquiries about her antecedents. Mrs. Ewell even has been heard to say that her dear son Sir Wilfrid could not possibly have formed a better choice, although the first revelations made to her concerning her new daughter-in-law threw her into violent hysterics. But she loves the leeks and the garlic of Egypt, and it would be bad policy in her to do anything but flatter the reigning queen.

Mrs. Warner lives at Lambscote with her daughter, and to Jane's delight and the general satisfaction, Sir Wilfrid engaged Miss Prosser, at a liberal salary, to accompany her old friend to her new house in the capacity of companion. So that the poor old mother is perfectly happy, roaming with Miss Prosser over the gardens and estate all day, and is as little troublesome to the household as a weak-witted person can be.

The cottage at Chelsea is pulled down, and a terrace of Elizabethan houses is being erected on its site. Jane felt a pang when she first heard the news, but now she is glad of it. She suffered too much under that roof to care to revisit it. She would rather know that it exists no more.

Sir Wilfrid has grown into a regular country gentleman, and thinks more of the fattening of his stock and the draining of his land than of the pleasures of town, a taste in which he is both aided and encouraged by his sister and his wife. He is very fond of Jane. He does not love her with the unreasoning passion he bestowed on Lena. She is not the sort of

woman to excite such a madness. But he is proud of her. Proud of her sense, her notability, and her unswerving rectitude, and he admires her for all these virtues more than any woman he has ever seen. He never embarks in any project without asking her advice, nor succeeds in any undertaking without attributing his luck to her. He clings to her as she has never clung to him, although she loves him faithfully and truly, and upholds his dignity and authority before her own. It is said that a woman never cares for her husband and her children in like proportion, and that the strength of affection is invariably concentrated upon either one or the other. Jane is no exception to this rule. Her children possess the larger portion of her soul. Perhaps, when a man has behaved as Sir Wilfrid behaved to her, it is not *possible* for a woman to love him with the same measure she did before. When he has deserted her, betrayed her, or been false to her, she may not be able to detach her love from him—she may, in her womanly compassion, pity his very weakness, and throw a veil over it, to hide it from the world. But she can never esteem nor respect him again. And without esteem or respect love is a very unsatisfactory thing.

But Lady Ewell has her children—fair, healthy, vigorous saplings of the parent tree—and they fill her life with an ever-increasing joy. The fulness of content beams on her placid countenance, and gratitude rises from her swelling breast, as she watches her brood tumbling over one another beneath the chestnut-trees upon the lawn.

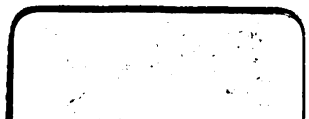
But, though it is a secret known only to herself, there is one child amongst them all to whom Lady Ewell's soul is bound up as though their lives were welded one into the other. They are hardly ever seen apart, she and the slight fair-haired girl who hangs upon her arm, with her earnest grey eyes searching her mother's face, as though she would demand *what* sacrifice she could make in order to prove her love and devotion to her. And this is Nellie—the little waif and stray that *some one* put over the garden wall—the blossom that was found in the lily bed—the angel that God sent in His mercy from heaven to strengthen and sustain the heart of Jane Warner.

THE END.





7



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